# Hyper-Zionism

## *Germany, the Nazi Past and Israel*

Edited by

Hans Kundnani

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# Introduction

*Hans Kundnani*

During the past almost two years since the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, Germany has provided Israel with extraordinary, unconditional support. Already the second largest exporter of weapons to Israel, it has increased its weapons supplies by tenfold.[1] It has supported Israel in the genocide case brought against it by South Africa in the International Court of Justice (ICJ).[2] And after Israel alleged that some United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) employees had participated in the 7 October attack, Germany also suspended its funding to the agency, to which it was the second-largest donor after the United States.[3]

What makes Germany's unconditional support for Israel so striking is the way it uses conditionality so enthusiastically in its foreign policy in general – including against other member states of the European Union, which is often imagined as a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, or 'community of fate'. Germany's approach after the beginning of the euro crisis in 2010, following the model set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was to offer loans to indebted countries if they carried out structural reform – that is, if they liberalized their economies.[4] This expansion of the use of conditionality has transformed the EU.[5] Yet when it comes to Israel, any imposition of conditionality seems to be almost unthinkable.

However, if Germany's diplomatic, financial, and military support for Israel is similar to that of the United Kingdom or the United States, where it seems to have gone even further than them is in its suppression of internal dissent. People around the world have been shocked by the way that many

artists and intellectuals have been punished in various ways for expressing sympathy with, or support for, the Palestinian people. As Adam Tooze put it in March 2024: ‘Barely a day goes by without news from Germany of some further act of censorship, silencing, deplatforming, directed at artists and public intellectuals seeking to understand and react adequately to the awful violence in Gaza.’[6]

This invocation of the Holocaust to suppress criticism of Israel has undermined the perception of Germany’s *Erinnerungskultur*, or memory culture, as an exemplary form of reckoning with the past – a perception that had been especially strong in the United States. Even Susan Neiman, who has run the Einstein Forum in Potsdam since 2000 and wrote a book, published in 2019, that celebrated Germany’s memory culture as a model for the United States, now thinks it has gone ‘haywire’.[7] Neiman speaks of a particularly German ‘philosemitic McCarthyism’ – though, since it has often also been directed against Jews who are critical of Israel, like the *New Yorker* writer Masha Gessen and the artist Candice Breitz, it may be more apt to call it ‘Zionist McCarthyism’.[8]

This volume tries to make sense of what is now happening in Germany and to put developments in Germany since 7 October 2023 into context. It differentiates the real history of the relationship between Germany and Israel from the myths around it that have been deliberately created. It shows how Germany’s *Erinnerungskultur* has in the last several decades hardened into what Dirk Moses calls the ‘German catechism’. Finally, it shows how this has impacted German society – in particular, through the sprawling system of largely unaccountable antisemitism commissioners that was created after the Bundestag passed a resolution condemning the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) movement as antisemitic in 2019.[9]

In the early 2010s, I had wondered whether declining domestic public support might lead to a weakening of Germany's commitment to Israel. A generational shift was taking place as the 1968 generation, for whom the Nazi past was existential and personal, were succeeded by Germans with a more distant and indifferent attitude to it. In particular, sociologists had shown how the children of the sixty-eighters could not imagine that their grandparents could have been Nazis.[10] The next generation again seemed to be even more indifferent to the Nazi past.[11] Moreover, immigration had made German society more diverse – and immigrants had their own, often quite different, sense of what the right lessons from the Nazi past were.

What has emerged in the last decade, however, is not so much a post-Zionist Germany as a hyper-Zionist Germany.[12] Even as the collective memory of the Holocaust is complicated by generational and demographic change, German elites have doubled down on their commitment to Israel. In fact, part of the reason they seem to have done so is that they feared their understanding of the lessons of the Nazi past was not, or no longer, widely shared, and they wanted to make it non-negotiable before it is too late – to lock it in, as it were. This is the significance of the idea of Israeli security as German *Staatsräson*, or *raison d'état* – it takes Germany's commitment to Israel out of the space of democratic contestation.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I tells the history of the relationship between the Federal Republic and the state of Israel, beginning with the Luxembourg Agreement – the *Wiedergutmachungsabkommen*, or Reparations Agreement, that was signed in 1952. Part II discusses some of the debates about the Nazi past, the Holocaust and Israel that have taken place in Germany in the last few decades and introduces some of the central

concepts that shape Germany's approach to Israel. Part 3 examines in more detail what is now happening in Germany and the impact it has on cultural and intellectual life in Germany and on Jews and Arab and Muslim Germans.

In chapter 1, Daniel Marwecki reviews the early phase of the relationship between West Germany and Israel from the founding of both states in the late 1940s to the Six-Day War in 1967. He shows that the prevalent idea of the relationship between Germany and Israel as a 'miracle of reconciliation' is a myth. When West Germany agreed to pay reparations to Israel in 1952, it had not yet even begun the long process of facing up to the Nazi past. In fact, Konrad Adenauer felt compelled to pay reparations because of what he saw as the power of *Weltjudentum* – in other words, Germany's 'reconciliation' with Israel began with an antisemitic conspiracy theory.

In chapter 2, Adam Tooze discusses a key development in the next phase of the relationship between the Federal Republic and Israel: the supply of German-made Dolphin submarines, which began under Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1991. In Germany, the submarines are often seen as harmless compared to land-based weapons like tanks – and therefore in line with Germany's longstanding policy of not exporting weapons to 'regions of tension'.[13] The Dolphin deal can also be seen as a covert way for Germany to subsidize its struggling submarine industry after the end of the Cold War. But Tooze shows that the real significance of the Dolphins is the way they allowed Israel to complete the so-called nuclear triad by developing a sea-based second-strike capability.

In chapter 3, I examine the origins of the idea of Israeli security as German *Staatsräson*, or *raison d'état*. I argue that, during the last two decades, Germany's *Erinnerungskultur* has regressed as it has gone from a

universalist understanding of the lessons of the Nazi past to a more particularist understanding that is limited to protecting Israel. The key figure in this regression is Angela Merkel. But the German New Left has also played a surprising role in it – although it was central to the emergence of the universalist understanding of the lessons of the Nazi past, it has acquiesced in the shift to a more particularist understanding.

In chapter 4, Dirk Moses explains his idea of the 'German catechism' and the role of Israel in it. Moses, a leading figure in genocide studies, has been at the centre of debates about the Holocaust in the last five years – especially after he introduced the idea of the catechism in 2021. In this chapter in this volume, he argues that it is not so much that Germany's commitment to Israel follows from its understanding of the 'singularity' of the Holocaust but rather the other way around: it is necessary to insist on the 'singularity' of the Holocaust in order to maintain Germany's unconditional support for Israel.

In chapter 5, Jürgen Zimmerer, the leading historian of German colonialism and another key figure in debates about memory in Germany in the last few years, shows how a different logic applies to Germany's approach to its colonial history than to its approach to the Holocaust. Yet, he argues, the two logics are also connected: the idea of the 'singularity' of the Holocaust functions as a way to limit German liability. Above all, Germany continues to seek to prevent an obligation to pay reparations to countries other than Israel – not only former colonies such as Namibia but also countries in Europe like Greece that have demanded reparations.

In chapter 6, Daniel Cohen analyses the evolution of 'philosemitism' in post-war Germany. Echoing Marwecki's analysis of the Adenauer era, Cohen shows that, in Allied-occupied Germany in the immediate post-war period, philosemitism was initially motivated by opportunism – what he

calls a ‘tactical’ or ‘transactional’ philosemitism. He shows how, from the 1950s onwards, some in Germany began to engage with the Nazi past in a more genuine way, which tended to go together with sympathy for Israel. By the 1990s, this had produced what he calls a ‘nationalised’ philosemitism, which culminated in the ‘sacralisation’ of Israel embodied by the speech that Merkel gave in the Knesset in 2008.

In chapter 7, Esra Özyürek analyses the effect of Germany’s approach to the Nazi past on Arab and Muslim Germans. Drawing on the fieldwork she did for her important book *Subcontractors of Guilt*, which appeared in 2023, she shows how Arabs and Muslims have become the focus of attempts to externalize guilt for the Holocaust. Most antisemitic crimes are committed by the far right. But the focus of public policy has been on the ‘imported’ antisemitism of Arab and Muslim Germans and especially Palestinian-Germans – a focus that has intensified further during the last year. Thus Germany’s *Erinnerungskultur* undermines its ability to function as a multicultural society.

In chapter 8, Hanno Hauenstein discusses a number of high-profile cases of artists, academics, and writers who have been cancelled in the last five years since the BDS resolution in 2019 and the attacks on ‘post-colonial theory’, which seems to play the same role in the German version of the culture wars that critical race theory plays in the United States.[14] As a result of what Hauenstein calls its exceptionalism, German cultural institutions are becoming increasingly isolated. As the former director of the Goethe-Institut put it this year: ‘Longstanding partners in the international cultural world are losing trust in the liberality of Germany’s democracy.’[15]

In chapter 9, Nahed Samour develops this point further and examines how extra-legal measures based on the archaic concept of *Staatsräson*

undermine the rule of law in Germany. She shows how, even though the sixteenth-century concept was initially resurrected as a way to guide German foreign policy, it has increasingly also been applied domestically – that is, not only Israeli security but also the protection of Jewish life in Germany itself are understood to be part of German *Staatsräson*. Yet as even the Bundestag's own research service has pointed out, the idea of *Staatsräson* is antithetical to the rule of law and the idea of a constitutional state – in other words it is not just anti-democratic but also illiberal.[16]

The chapters in this volume confirm Susan Neiman's sense that Germany has gone 'haywire'. But they also show that developments that have taken place in the last five years, since the Bundestag's BDS resolution in 2019, have a much longer history that stretches all the way back to the founding of the Federal Republic and the lies that Germany has told itself about its *Erinnerungskultur* and its relationship with Israel. The story of Germany's coming to terms with the Nazi past was always one of escapism as much as engagement – and contrition for the Holocaust was always instrumentalized for political purposes in both domestic and foreign policy.

What several of the contributions to this volume also suggest in different ways is that Germany seems to have regressed. German history is often thought of as a kind of 'learning process'. But although this implies progress, learning can also be pathological. In particular, the essays in this volume make it clear that what has happened in Germany in the last two decades – and in an intensified form since 7 October – must be understood as an authoritarian turn, or rather an authoritarian *return*. What makes this distortion of the long process of 'working through the past' especially

bizarre, however, is that it is itself imagined as being based on the lessons of that past.

# Part I

# Myths and History

1

# A Miracle of Reconciliation? Behind the Façade of German–Israeli Relations

*Daniel Marwecki*

In late 1965, two years after retiring from office, Konrad Adenauer – chancellor of the Federal Republic from its founding in 1949 until 1963 – was asked on television about the reparations it had paid to the state of Israel and the Jewish Claims Committee. Adenauer replied:

> We had done so much injustice to the Jews, committed such crimes against them that somehow these had to be expiated or repaired, if we were at all to regain our international standing … Furthermore, the power of the Jews even today, especially in America, should not be underestimated.[1]

Adenauer's reply illustrates the way in which the objective of German rehabilitation was closely intertwined with a central idea of modern antisemitism: that of Jewish power. It is indeed difficult to separate constructions of assumed Jewish might from the goal of rehabilitation, which stands at the historical core of the German turn towards Israel. According to the Israeli historian Tom Segev, Nahum Goldmann, chief negotiator for Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference, was aware of

Adenauer's fear of Jewish power and used it to his advantage during the negotiations, pointing to ominous 'consequences' in the event of a failure to reach an agreement.

The Israeli motive for seeking German reparations, meanwhile, was clear, and had nothing to do with forgiveness. By 1952, the Israeli economy was in crisis, and the survival of the state was far from guaranteed. The Reparations Agreement was meant as a crucial contribution to Israel's consolidation. However, there was much opposition to it within Israel.[2] The fact that Ben-Gurion was willing to risk his political career on the German question demonstrates that he saw it as an almost existential issue for the survival of Israel. But while Israel was driven towards Germany out of material interest, accepting German reparations became the first step towards the 'normalisation' of mutual relations that the German government sought.[3]

The agreement, signed in September 1952, was the first major treaty regulating German reparations for the Holocaust. In it, the Federal Republic committed to paying $823 million (3.45 billion Deutsche Mark) to Israel, approximately $7.8 billion in today's terms. Two-thirds of this sum came in the form of goods and services, predominantly investment goods, including raw materials for the building of industrial plants, machinery, and shipping fleet. Only one-third was paid in foreign currency. A London bank received the equivalent of DM1.05 billion in sterling, with which Israel was able to buy crude oil from British companies – quite literally the fuel needed for the industrialization boost afforded by the Reparations Agreement.[4]

German reparations came at a crucial time in Israel's development and helped the economy out of a bottleneck. After the ceasefire agreements of 1949, the Jewish population of Israel had doubled, with survivors from Europe's displaced person camps and refugees from Arab countries coming

into the country in equal numbers. The government needed to impose a strict austerity and rationing programme on the population to meet basic housing and welfare needs. Compared with West Germany, the population of Israel was poor and lacked basic amenities.[5] Population growth overburdened the economy to such a degree that immigration was halted in early 1952, shortly before reparation negotiations with the Federal Republic began.

The significance of German reparation capital can be seen in Israel's growth rate during the 1950s. While the Gross National Product (GNP) rose by 1.8 per cent between 1952 and 1953, its growth rate increased almost tenfold, to 17 per cent, in the years 1954–55, when the deliveries under the agreement began.[6] From 1950 to 1965, however, GNP increased by 11 per cent annually. An expansion, according to Jonathan Nitzan and Shimson Bichler, 'driven by two main forces: population growth and foreign aid'.[7] The capital inflow provided by the Reparations Agreement was in fact three times higher than grants in aid provided by the US government at the time. According to Lily Gardner Feldman, Israel received $757.3 million worth of reparations capital from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) between 1953 and 1965.[8] In comparison, US grants stood at only $214.7 million for that period. No wonder Israel's main negotiator, Nahum Goldmann, called the agreement 'downright salvation' for Israel.

For West Germany, which had been reconstructed and became wealthy immediately after World War II, the rehabilitation granted by the Reparations Agreement was in fact modestly priced, demonstrating the extreme economic and power differential between the two countries. In the first two years of the agreement, reparations paid to Israel amounted to no more than 0.2 per cent of German GNP. In the course of rapid economic growth, the percentage share of reparations to GNP fell to 0.06 per cent by

1965.[9] Given that reparations were paid in the form of capital goods, the agreement needs to be understood as a state-sponsored stimulus programme to the booming post-war West German economy.

**The Suez War and the arms relationship**

The military relationship between West Germany and Israel began in earnest after the 1956 Suez War, waged by Britain, France, and Israel against Egypt following Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. After Suez, Israel found itself in a situation where it had impressed upon the Middle East and the outside world its military capacities, yet it incurred a setback in its effort to ally itself militarily with the United States, which had opposed the Anglo–French–Israeli invasion. Acquiring American weapons now became a rather more distant prospect. Meanwhile, the influence in the Middle East of Israel's allies, France and the United Kingdom, was severely curtailed.

Furthermore, Israel's alliance with the French was to a large degree predicated on the Algerian War of Independence. The French supplied Israel mainly because of the threat it posed to Nasser's Egypt, which was arming the Algerian National Liberation Front. Accordingly, French support of Israel waned after President Charles de Gaulle extracted the French forces from Algeria in 1962. Although West Germany had been officially neutral, Adenauer was sympathetic to the British, French, and Israeli cause. The German reaction to the events of 1956 demonstrated to the Ben-Gurion administration 'Adenauer's commitment to the existence, security and prosperity of the State of Israel'. It is also after Suez that the Federal Republic 'began to see Israel as a strategic asset in the Cold War'.[10]

It is within this context that Israeli prime minister Ben-Gurion's 'New Germany' policy emerged.[11] He sought to demarcate Adenauer's Germany from that of Hitler in order to legitimize ties with the FRG. The policy rested on the continued German commitment to the consolidation of the Israeli state, and represented a symbolic concession to acquire material support. As the Israeli historian Roni Stauber notes: 'According to the founding father of the Jewish State, the German state which was founded on the ruins of Nazi Germany and where millions of its former citizens still lived – officers, soldiers, and murderers – would help the Jewish People against those who arose to destroy their state.'[12]

One of those former soldiers and regime adherents was Franz-Josef Strauß. In his capacity as defence minister from 1956 to 1962, he was, along with Konrad Adenauer, the key figure driving the military relationship with Israel. In December 1956, the then deputy defence minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, visited Strauß in his snow-covered residence in Rott am Inn in Bavaria. Peres wrote about this meeting:

> Within only a few months of our first meeting, very valuable equipment began to reach the Israeli army. It consisted of German army surplus and equipment manufactured in Germany … We obtained ammunition, training devices, helicopters, spare parts and many other items. The quality was excellent and the quantities were considerable – compared with what we had been used to, though they were still far short of what the Egyptians were receiving. For the first time the impoverished Israeli army, which had had to skimp and scrape and stretch its thin resources to the utmost, felt almost pampered.[13]

Strauß had not initially been favourable towards Israel. In fact, he had abstained in the Bundestag vote on the ratification of the Reparations Agreement, which he saw as a threat to German relations with Arab states. However, he changed his mind once he became minister of defence. His interests in relations with Israel reflected closely his interests in Germany regaining its military power, the growth of German arms industries, as well as his views on Cold War confrontation, in which he foresaw a role for Israel as a western bastion against Arab nationalism and Soviet influence in the Middle East. In an interview with the German journalist Rolf Vogel, one of Adenauer's confidants and a chronicler of German–Israeli relations, Strauß explained his change of mind as follows:

> I was of the opinion that effective co-operation between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel would be a significant contribution towards the task of leaving the past behind us. I meant this in the sense, not only of the reacceptance of Germany in the world, but acceptance of the Federal Republic of Germany as a state with equal rights in the field of present-day world politics.[14]

Military relations as they emerged after Suez consisted not only of German weapon deliveries to Israel, but also of Israeli arms sales to West Germany, among those the well-known Uzi submachine gun. The purchase of Israeli arms was intended as an indirect form of economic aid, supporting Israel's growing arms industry.[15] But it was also seen in terms of rehabilitation. Vogel, who had a hand in the Uzi deal, summarized German thinking: 'The Uzi in the hand of the German soldier is better than any

brochure against antisemitism.' Yigal Allon, a Knesset member of the left-leaning Ahdut HaAvodah and later minister of defence, also understood the German motivation for buying Israeli weapons: 'The Germans have purchased these weapons not because the weapons are good, but because they are Jewish.'[16]

This need for rehabilitation also featured prominently in the West German handling of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Adenauer was concerned about the potential damage that the trial might do to West Germany's reputation and, at a press conference before the trial in Jerusalem started, said he was concerned that the public proceedings would result in a 'judgement about us Germans as a whole'. But in reality, he said, Nazis had 'committed the exact same crimes against other Germans that Eichmann perpetrated against the Jews' and 'the overwhelming majority of people gladly helped Jewish fellow citizens whenever they could'.[17] In other words, nobody had helped Europe's Jews more than the Germans, who were themselves victims of National Socialism.

By the time of the creation of the Federal Republic in 1949, denazification had ended, and many former Nazis were living undisturbed amid West Germany's middle class. One was Hans Globke, Adenauer's chief of staff and an erstwhile Nazi lawyer who had helped give the Nuremberg Laws the imprimatur of legality. But a few months after Adenauer's press conference, David Ben-Gurion gave an interview to a German newspaper in which he signalled that the German government need not worry. 'Nazi Germany no longer exists,' he said. 'The development of our relations with contemporary Germany depends upon the intentions and policies of the German government. For our part, we are prepared to have a close, normal relationship and to work together to the fullest extent.'[18]

The officials dispatched by the German government to observe the Eichmann trial reported that they were pleased that the Israeli prosecutor did not ‘ascribe the crimes against Jews to the Germans as such’ but only to Nazi officials like Eichmann.[19] The same report closed with a rather remarkable observation:

> One of the strongest impressions left on the European visitor is the novel and very advantageous type of the Israeli youth. This youth exhibits almost none of the features which one was used to view as Jewish. Of great height, often blond and blue-eyed, free and self-determined in their movements with well-defined faces, the offspring of the German Jewish immigrants represent a new type of the Jew that was unknown until now.[20]

This rather astonishing type of openly racist German over-identification with Israeli Jews starkly illustrates how continuities of German antisemitism can express themselves in a pro-Israeli attitude. In this case, Israel is represented in terms of German self-descriptions of a distinctly pre-1945 era, with the Israeli Jew having become an Aryan. The German identification with Israeli military capacity in terms such as these is a corollary to the fact that in their formative phase under consideration in this chapter, German politics towards Israel served not to confront the past but to whitewash its continuities – a rationale accepted by Israel in return for the means to build the state.

**West Germany and the Six-Day War**

In the standard historiography of German–Israeli relations, the year 1965 marks a significant turning point. This was the year when the two countries officially recognized each other, exchanging ambassadors with relations fully ‘normalized’.[21] If, however, one views the German–Israeli relationship from a broader perspective of the history of the modern Middle East, the real turning point is the Six-Day War of 1967. It was at this point that the German consolidation and arming of Israel played an important role in the Israeli success that fundamentally altered the political landscape of the region.

From the West German point of view, the way that Israel had handled the Eichmann trial without damaging the Federal Republic’s reputation had cleared the way for the weapon deliveries promised earlier. What began in the mid-1950s in Bavaria would in the early 1960s expand into extensive, covert military cooperation. In 1962, following the Eichmann trial, another large aid package was put together, which provided all kinds of equipment essential to Israel’s ongoing war effort, from howitzers to helicopters and airplanes. Later, tanks manufactured in the United States were added via a three-way trade.

On 12 June 1967, two days after the Arab-Israeli War ended, the West German ambassador to Israel, Rolf Pauls, sent a short but telling telegram to Willy Brandt, the future Social Democrat chancellor who at the time was the foreign minister in the grand coalition led by Hans-Georg Kiesinger, Adenauer’s successor. Pauls informed Brandt that ‘an officer of the general staff [the highest army echelon] told me that the modernized, more heavily armoured tanks delivered by us proved their worth in excellent fashion’.[22] While French Mirage jets won the decisive air campaign, German-delivered

tanks were central to the formation of the Israeli tank corps and played a vital role in the Sinai ground battle.

The West German media's reactions to Israel's victory in the Six-Day War are particularly striking. One headline in the tabloid *Bild*, owned by the Springer corporation, read: 'VICTORY! Dayan – Israel's Rommel.' The declaration of victory, written in capital letters, was followed by an equation of Israeli general Moshe Dayan with the 'desert fox', Erwin Rommel, Hitler's general in North Africa.[23] Rudolf Augstein, the founding editor of the *Der Spiegel* and an Iron Cross holder for his services in the Wehrmacht, wrote that Israeli soldiers 'rolled like Rommel' and described Israel's success as 'Blitzsieg im Blitzkrieg' ('lightning victory in the lightning war').[24]

On 6 June 1967, *Die Welt*, another Springer publication, spoke of the 'second assassination attempt against the people of Israel in this century. The world began to remember. Germany did not need to. We know Europe's graveyards, over which no grass has grown in the past 25 years.'[25] The reason why Springer knew 'Europe's graveyards' so well was because many of the journalists it employed helped to dig them. In fact, Springer's simultaneous reintegration of former Nazis and support of Israel mirrors the policy of the Adenauer republic, undertaken with the goal of whitewashing the German past and glossing over its continuities in the present.

The conflict in the Middle East also made possible two intersecting forms of German guilt deferral. The first was the identification of German soldiers with Israeli ones, effectively blurring the historical relationship between German perpetrators and Jewish victims. The second was the perceived roles of 'true' Nazis that could be attributed to Israel's Arab adversaries. Without denying the salience of antisemitism or Nazi propaganda in the Arab world, it is easy to see why the trope of 'Arabs as

Nazis' holds a particular meaning in the German context, as it allows for the transposition of the historical German role of the Nazi perpetrator onto present-day Arabs.

The early history of relations between the Federal Republic and Israel informs the present. When German chancellor Olaf Scholz flew to Israel shortly after 7 October, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated at the closing press conference that 'Hamas are the new Nazis'. The implication was clear: Germany could, this time, place itself on the right side of history by helping the Jewish state against the Nazis of today and thus overcome its guilt by helping Israel fight its present enemies. What Netanyahu expressed here encapsulated almost perfectly the historical logic of the German–Israeli relationship going back to its origins in the 1950s.

2

# Not Hiroshima or Oslo but Gaza: German U-boats and the Israeli Nuclear Deterrent

*Adam Tooze*

In April 2012 Günter Grass published a controversial prose poem, entitled ‘Was gesagt werden muss’ (‘What Must Be Said’), in which he suggested he was breaking a long silence about Germany’s relationship with Israel:

> But why have I kept silent till now?
> Because I thought my own origins,
> Tarnished by a stain that can never be removed,
> meant I could not expect Israel, a land
> to which I am, and always will be, attached,
> to accept this open declaration of the truth.[1]

Given that, a few years earlier, Grass revealed he had volunteered for the Waffen SS as a teenager, it was easy to dismiss the poem. Ephraim Zuroff, the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, described Grass as ‘totally compromised’ and said that ‘the tin drum he is banging is not the one of moral conscience but of deep-seated prejudice against the Jewish people’.[2] Yet Grass’s claim to be breaking a silence captures something real.

One of the basic paradoxes of Germany's commitment to Israel is that the most vital part cannot be spoken out loud. This is in part because of the sensitivity to which Grass rather clumsily alludes. But more immediately it is because it involves a horror that violates German norms and yet has been fundamental to Israel's survival strategy since the 1960s. That unspeakable thing is not the denial of Palestinian rights or illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. Rather, it is Germany's support for what is politely called Israel's nuclear deterrence: Israel's de facto nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. Grass wrote:

> Why only now, grown old,
> and with what ink remains, do I say:
> Israel's atomic power endangers
> an already fragile world peace?

The 'atomic power' that he refers to is Israel's unacknowledged but credible threat to meet any existential threat to its security with a massive nuclear strike.

**The Samson option**

Of course, such a threat is not peculiar to Israel. It is the obscene core of nuclear deterrence everywhere. France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, along with Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea all threaten each other and any other enemy with millionfold killing, the annihilation of entire cities and, in the case of the major powers, the end of

human life on the planet. Germany is forbidden by treaty to hold or develop such weapons itself. But as part of NATO, Bundeswehr troops have long trained to deploy US-controlled weapons. Throughout the Cold War, West Germany's security depended on precisely such an escalation chain – and still does today under NATO's Article 5.

For Israel since the 1960s, the so-called Samson option has been the last ditch of security policy. It is called the Samson option to distinguish it from the Masada option. The legendary defence of Masada ended with the demonstrative suicide of the Sicarii rebels. Samson, by contrast, brought a Philistine temple down on his captors, killing himself along with thousands of his enemies. The Israeli strategy of the 1960s and 1970s was based on the assumption that Israel would, as a last resort, engage in nuclear first use in the event that it was overrun by conventional Arab armies. Since the 1980s, as fear has increased that Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and others might acquire nuclear weapons, the logic has shifted to deter nuclear blackmail.

Israel began working on its nuclear programme from 1956 at the Dimona facility in the Negev desert. France supplied uranium and the first reactor, but forensic accounting strongly suggests that the Federal Republic paid the bills for Israel's early nuclear programme.[3] Between 1961 and 1973, $500 million was transferred as subsidized credits from the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Germany's policy bank, for purposes of 'Negev development'. The projects itemized – a large textile factory and a desalination facility – could hardly account for half a billion dollars in spending. Shielded from international inspection by an agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and President Richard Nixon in 1969, Israel had developed as many as twenty warheads by the time of the 1973 war.

Initially, Israel relied on its air force to deliver these warheads. But aircraft are the least secure form of delivery. For deterrence purposes, ballistic missiles are preferred because they are harder to intercept. Germany certainly had expertise in that department. But by the 1960s, the Third Reich's rocket experts were already working for the United States, the Soviet Union and Israel's Arab enemies. Israel acquired its first generation of missiles, the Jericho I series, from France's Dassault. After 1973, in cooperation with the South African apartheid regime, with which Israel shared nuclear technology, Israel embarked on the development of the Jericho II series, which is thought to have a range of 1,500–3,500 km.

These missiles gave Israel the ability to reach Iran and every Arab state. In the 2000s, a further improvement in the form of the Jericho III is thought to have extended the range to 4,800–6,500 km, allowing Israel to also hit Pakistan – the only Muslim-majority country that has nuclear weapons.[4] But while ballistic missiles are harder to intercept than airborne bombs, they remain vulnerable to pre-emptive strikes by enemy missile forces. Thus, according to standard nuclear logic, what Israel needed to complete its triad of deterrence is a secure second-strike capacity, in the form of submarine-based weapons – and it is around submarines that the German–Israeli relationship revolves.

**German submarine technology**

It may seem incongruous that, in the accounting of German aid for Israel, specifically on the military side, submarines outweigh all other elements. After all, Israel is a quintessential land and air power. Naval power has a remoteness from life on land that gives it a different political valence than other kinds of military power – in particular, it is thought of as less

threatening to civilians. This is especially the case for submarines, which we still think of as anti-ship weapons as they were in World War II. But naval forces are also the prime instrument of blockade – for example, they are the key to isolating Gaza – and in the nuclear era, submarines have become the prime platform for secure second-strike capacity.

With the help of German engineers, the Soviets were the first to launch a ballistic missile from a submarine in 1955. Four years later, the USS *George Washington*, equipped with sixteen Polaris nuclear-tipped missiles, put to sea. Today, more than half the US nuclear deterrent, and almost all of France and Britain's nuclear missiles, are submarine based. But whereas France and Britain, in conjunction with the United States, produce their own submarines, Israel depends on Germany. Thus it is not just that Germany is beholden to Israel but also that Israel is beholden to Germany – if you are in the market for a submarine, the chances are you will need Germany, the world's most successful exporter of submarine technology.[5]

This technology is based on expertise built up during World War II – the most prolific submarine design office in the world in the post-war period, the Ingenieurkontors Lübeck (IKL), was established in the 1950s by Ulrich Gabler, one of the most decorated survivors of the wartime U-boat fleet. It was therefore not surprising that, when Israel commissioned a new batch of submarines in the 1960s, it turned to Gabler's design team. The compact 420-ton Gal class were based on the German HDW Type 206 submarine class (Type 540) but manufactured at Vickers in Britain. However, though the Gal class confirmed the worth of submarines for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and continued in service until the 1990s, it was too small to serve as a platform for missile launching.

When Israeli naval planners began to think about long-range missiles in the 1970s, the main threat was not Iran but ‘second tier’ Arab states – in particular, the rising power of Saudi Arabia. In 1982, when Chancellor Helmut Schmidt was considering supplying Riyadh with Leopard II main battle tanks, Menachem Begin accused him of complicity in the Holocaust as a Wehrmacht officer in World War II. Germany cancelled the order and took steps to clarify its export regime, loosening overall regulations but inserting a provision to ensure Israel’s interests were considered. The incident illustrates the way that, although submarines are ultimately a far larger and ultimately more deadly weapon, tanks remain more politically sensitive – to this day Germany supplies Israel only with tank engines.

In the early 1980s, the focus shifted to Iraq, which at the time was on a giant weapons buying spree. In 1981 Israel carried out a military strike on Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor just outside Baghdad. But although the strike set back Saddam’s nuclear programme, it did not stop either his ballistic missile or his chemical and biological weapons programmes. Nor did it stop global engineering expertise flocking to Iraq. German businesses and engineers played a particularly prominent role.[6] As in the field of submarines, Germany was a hub for machine tools, chemical engineering, and avionics. Although the scale of this entanglement with Iraq was no secret, the West German authorities turned a blind eye to it.

Israel did not have the buying power of Iraq – in the 1980s it was struggling with inflation and going through a brutal fiscal consolidation, which also hit the military-industrial complex. But it too had sought West German industrial expertise. The full extent of this came to light when the German parliament opened an enquiry into shady dealing between IKL in Lübeck and the pariah regime of South Africa. The investigation revealed that IKL had provided South Africa with mountains of blueprints necessary

to manufacture a new generation of submarines. The Bundestag inquiry also discovered that, since 1986, another of IKL's more sensitive clients was Israel.

**The Dolphin deal**

In the 1980s, Israel was looking to upgrade its navy to a new generation of heavier vessels. In particular, it was looking to order three new submarines that would be three times the size of the Gal class. But for such expensive weapons, it was dependent on American financial aid, which was tied to the purchase of American-made weapons. To accommodate this requirement, IKL agreed that the assembly of the U-boats could take place at the Ingalls dockyard in Mississippi and Rockwell could provide the electronic control system. On this basis, an agreement was signed in New York in 1989 – a highly significant formalization of German-American support for Israel. But the deal almost fell apart when the Israeli military insisted that it wanted the U-boats outfitted with German-made fire control electronics.

However, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in August 1991 put it back on track. Initially, to the horror of the Israeli navy, the U-boat order was suspended. But the Kohl government quickly faced a rolling disaster of publicity, which began with the publication by the Simon Wiesenthal Institute of an investigative report exposing Germany's role in arming Iraq and culminated with the launch of Iraqi rockets against Tel Aviv and Haifa. The nightmare vision was of Israelis choking to death, like Kurds and Iranians before them, under a cloud of German-manufactured Iraqi poison gas. In response, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher committed to provide DM 1.2 billion in military support, consisting principally of the funding for two U-boat orders.

This pivot by the Kohl government is often presented as a hasty decision, driven by embarrassment, and only tangentially related to what was going on in the Middle East. The German government also had industrial policy motives – with the end of the Cold War in sight, the U-boat dockyards needed to be kept busy. But the significance of the deal looks different when we spell out what Germany was in fact providing to Israel. On paper, Israel had ordered, and Germany was paying for, upgraded versions of best-selling Type 209 U-boat. The declared purpose was naval operations, reconnaissance, and landing commandos. But the modifications to the design that Israel wanted suggested otherwise.

Conventionally, submarines fire torpedoes through tubes located at the front of the hull. NATO uses 533 mm calibre torpedoes. But, at some point in the early 1990s, the bow end of the Israeli Dolphin-class boats was modified to accommodate four tubes rated at 650 mm. This 12 cm enlargement matters. The common assumption in submarine circles is that, as well as torpedoes, it allows Israel's Dolphin-class boats to fire cruise missiles – an excellent delivery system for nuclear warheads. Germany could have queried the modification, but did not do so – the official line was that modifications were up to the client.

In Israel, however, the case for the German-made submarines was made more explicitly. Why was the navy committing resources to this project at a moment of domestic fiscal austerity and high international tension? In the midst of the First Intifada, was this merely an irrelevant vanity project? In December 1990 former navy commander Major General Avraham Botzer explained on Israeli TV that the submarines were 'part of the deterrent system against nonconventional warfare'.[7] In this case, 'nonconventional warfare' does not mean insurgency. What Botzer was outlining was the logic of a submarine-based nuclear second-strike capacity.

The first two German Dolphins were delivered in 1999. The third, also paid for in large part by Germany, followed in 2000. Those deliveries coincided with reports in the global military press that Israel was shifting the focus of its nuclear strategy to focus on long-range missiles rather than tactical or airborne bombs.[8] But for the submarines, what was needed was a cruise missile – and Germany could not help with those. In 2000, Israel requested the US Tomahawk, which in its nuclear capable version has a range of 2500 km. But after the Clinton administration turned down the request, Israel was forced to resort to its own technologies.

Israel had already developed the Popeye series of cruise missiles in the 1980s. Popeye was compact enough to fit the widened torpedo tubes of the Israeli Dolphin boats, but was not known for its long range – that is, until news broke in 2000 that Israel had tested a cruise missile with a range of 1500 km in the Indian Ocean. Armed with such missiles, a submarine operating off the coast of Syria could hit Tehran. But beyond these scraps of information, we know next to nothing concrete about the capability of Israel's fleet of German-made Dolphin submarines, which is veiled in the same ambiguity that cloaks Israel's nuclear deterrent itself.

**Israel's MAD strategy**

In 2003, the Daniel Project, a strategic review commissioned by the Ariel Sharon government, recommended a policy of upholding Israel's nuclear ambiguity, with the option of revealing it in the event that Israel faced a concrete threat from a nuclearized Iran. In a rather cryptic passage, it suggested that Israel should hold open the option of a fully submarine-based deterrent. It seems that the strategy based on Israel's new German U-boats was still under development. But against the background of the escalation

of the Second Intifada with the Hamas suicide bombing campaign in the early 2000s, not everyone was as measured in their proposals as the Daniel Project.

In a darkly prescient interview, Martin van Creveld, professor of military history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem predicted that faced with the unbreakable resistance of the Palestinians, ‘more and more Israelis were coming to regard the “transfer” of the Palestinians as the only salvation’. He said that whether the world would ‘permit such ethnic cleansing’ depended on ‘who does it and how quickly it happens’. Israel, he said, now had ‘several hundred’ warheads which it could ‘launch them at targets in all directions’. He endorsed Moshe Dayan’s idea that Israel ‘must be like a mad dog’: ‘We have the capability to take the world down with us. And I can assure you that that will happen before Israel goes under.’[9]

At the time, few went as far as van Creveld in advocating nuclear threats as the shield for ethnic cleansing. But against the backdrop of the rise of Islamic militancy and the Iraq war, with Pakistan nuclearized and Iran and Saudi judged capable of rapidly nuclearizing, it was easy for hawks in Tel Aviv to make the case for more German submarines. In 2005 negotiations were finalized with Gerhard Schröder’s ‘red–green’ government for three more Dolphin-class boats. These were larger and more expensive than their predecessors and featured the closed propulsion system unique to German submarine design, allowing them to remain submerged for weeks on end. When German officials were questioned about the nuclear capability of the Dolphins, they stonewalled.

During the Obama administration, the question of nuclear non-proliferation became the focus of intense international attention. Israel made clear that it had no intention of joining any collective arms control agreement or deviating from its unilateral, nuclear deterrent strategy. While

acting as a good faith mediator in the elaborate negotiations designed to control Iran's nuclear build-up, Germany committed to delivering the latest in the series of U-boats to Israel. In 2012 Angela Merkel, who had taken over from Schröder in 2005, pushed through the financing of the sixth Dolphin-class boat despite widespread concerns about Benjamin Netanyahu's expansion of settlements on the West Bank and a report in the *Spiegel* that confirmed that German Defence Ministry officials had long known that Israel was deploying nuclear missiles on the Dolphins.[10]

During the Cold War, the objective of West Germany's own defence strategy had been to harden the escalation chain so that if Warsaw Pact tanks rolled across Germany's borders, the United States could be counted on to escalate to full-scale Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) – in other words to ensure that an attack on Western Europe would trigger the end of the world. One way of reading Merkel's declaration that Israeli security was part of German *Staatsräson* in her speech in the Knesset in 2008 is that she was promising that Germany would extend to Israel something analogous to NATO's Article 5 guarantee. Once we factor in American–German–Israeli U-boat and nuclear diplomacy, that proposition is not mere empty rhetoric.

The latest of Israel's German U-boats, INS Drakon, is thought to be large enough to accommodate a cluster of vertical launching tubes for ballistic missiles, which would allow Israel to fuse its on-land and at-sea missile programmes. Once deployed, they give Israel a hidden capacity to threaten targets across most of the world. With German assistance and American diplomatic cover, Israel has thus established a fully-fledged nuclear triad. If the aim is to secure Israel's existence, there is no better means available today – after all, it is the strategy chosen by the West itself. In that sense Germany's assistance has a clear logic. But what, beyond survival, does Israel do with the safety that nuclear deterrence provides?

In 1998 Shimon Peres, the father of Israel's nuclear programme, was quoted as saying that Israel had 'built a nuclear option not in order to have a Hiroshima but to have an Oslo'. But today Israeli intellectuals think differently. Louis René Beres, who chaired the Daniel Project, wrote in March that chaos was 'something potentially positive' – 'an auspicious "openness"' from which 'an expanding civilisational opportunity' might emerge.[11] For all the rhetorical invocation of existential threats to Israel, the real concern today must be that it is not existential risk but an ultimate security guaranteed by Israel's nuclear monopoly that encourages the current Israeli government to exploit chaos and licences it to pursue a strategy that is closer to van Creveld's dark vision than that which Peres intended: not Hiroshima or Oslo but Gaza.

3

# From Universalism to Particularism: Israeli Security as German *Staatsräson*

*Hans Kundnani*

Since 7 October 2023, much attention has rightly focused on individual cases of persecution against critics of Israel in Germany.[1] But how Germany's *Erinnerungskultur*, or memory culture, has evolved over time is less often discussed. Especially in the United States, many who imagined Germany to be a comparatively progressive country now assume that the memory of the Holocaust has always stipulated unconditional support for Israel. The reality, however, is more complex – and far stranger. During the last two decades, Germany's memory culture has regressed as it has abandoned the belief that the Holocaust bestowed on it a responsibility to humanity and replaced it with a responsibility to Israel alone.

The decisive figure in this evolution is Angela Merkel, the chancellor from 2005 to 2021 and the dominant figure in German politics in the last two decades. When she said in the Knesset in 2008 that Israel security was 'part of German *Staatsräson*', she gave the impression that she was merely confirming – or making explicit – a commitment that all her predecessors, going back to Konrad Adenauer, had made. In fact, however, the speech signalled a significant hardening of Germany's commitment to Israel. Since then, the German political establishment has gone much further in aligning itself with Israel – and against the Palestinians – than it had done previously.

However, Merkel was not the first to use the term *Staatsräson* in debates about German foreign policy. In fact, the story of the regression of German memory culture also involves the twists and turns of the German New Left since the 1960s, and the changing way in which it understood the lessons of the Nazi past, producing a bizarre alignment between the German centre-left and the American and Israeli right. This, in turn, explains how, as Susan Neiman put it in an essay in the *New York Review of Books*, Germany has a centre-left government that, on Israel, is 'somewhere to the right of AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee]'.[2] In order to understand how this happened, it is necessary to go back to the story of Germany's so-called 1968 generation and its complex relationship with the Holocaust.

**The 1968 generation and Israel**

What became known as the 1968 generation, or the *Achtundsechziger*, were the German equivalent of the baby boomers. But whereas US boomers were the children of the 'greatest generation', their German counterparts were the children of the 'Auschwitz generation'. Thus the question of how to deal with the Nazi past, and in particular what lessons to draw from the Holocaust, was for them existential. As they came of age in the mid-sixties, the 1968 generation began to challenge the pervasive silence about the Nazi past in the Federal Republic they had grown up in.

West Germany's first chancellor, the Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, effectively suppressed any real engagement with Nazism. Many of those involved in the Nazi regime were rehabilitated and reinstated to their former positions; by the mid-1950s, the elite in the civil service, judiciary, and academia had largely reverted to that of the Third Reich.

Many young people growing up in West Germany felt they were ‘surrounded by Nazis’, as Rainer Langhans, a leading figure in Kommune 1, a commune in West Berlin, put it.[3] By the mid-1960s, they had begun to see not just personal continuities but structural ones: the Federal Republic was a fascist – or at least ‘pre-fascist’ – state. The student movement emerged as a protest against these real and imagined continuities.

The symbolic beginning of the student rebellion was 2 June 1967, when West Berlin police killed a student, Benno Ohnesorg, at a demonstration against the visit by the Shah of Iran. Three days later, the Six-Day War began when Israel attacked its Arab neighbours. Until then, the West German New Left had tended to support Israel, which it saw as a socialist project. But as the student movement radicalized in the days after Ohnesorg’s killing, it also turned against Israel, now seen to be a bridgehead of American imperialism in the Middle East – a position that was in part a reaction to the hated right-wing media mogul Axel Springer’s vehement support for Israel; during the war, Springer quipped that he had published Israeli newspapers in German for six days.[4]

Over the next decade, as they became increasingly focused on and critical of Israel, some on the West German left crossed the line from anti-Zionism into antisemitism. This left-wing antisemitism reached its apex in 1976, when two Palestinians, belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and two West Germans, belonging to a group called Revolutionary Cells, hijacked an Air France jet and flew it to Entebbe, Uganda, where they separated out Israeli and Jewish passengers from the others, who were released.[5] In the subsequent Israeli raid to free the hostages, Benjamin Netanyahu’s brother Yonatan was killed – an event he cites as the beginning of his political life.[6]

Entebbe shocked many on the West German New Left, including Joschka Fischer, who at the time was a leading figure in a ‘spontaneist’ group in Frankfurt called Revolutionary Struggle. Fischer knew one of the hijackers, Wilfried Böse, from Frankfurt’s left-wing scene, and later told his biographer that the hijacking, and especially the separation of Jewish and non-Jewish passengers, illustrated to him ‘how those who emphatically set themselves apart from National Socialism and its crimes had almost compulsively repeated the crimes of the Nazis’. The failure of the New Left’s political project, and in particular its entanglement with terrorism, decisively shattered Fischer’s worldview, forcing him to rethink many of his political positions. The Nazi past and German responsibility for it remained central for him, but the lessons he drew from it changed.

Gradually, Fischer moved away from his earlier anti-Zionism. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, he defended it against critics within the political party he had recently joined, the Greens. Along with many of his former comrades, he also reconciled himself with the Federal Republic, which now appeared to disillusioned activists as a fragile democratic bulwark against fascism. German historian Heinrich August Winkler called this the ‘posthumous Adenauerian left’ – a left that had come to embrace many of the positions of Konrad Adenauer, the embodiment of what the student movement had once regarded as a fascist state. One of those positions was support for Israel.[7]

**Auschwitz and German *Staatsräson***

Fischer became increasingly preoccupied with the question of the implications of the Nazi past for German foreign policy. Upon becoming chancellor in 1982, Helmut Kohl had declared that ‘the Atlantic alliance is

the core of German *Staatsräson*'.[8] In 1985, on the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, Fischer wrote an article for the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* concluding: 'Only German responsibility for Auschwitz, not the Atlantic alliance, can be the essence of West German *Staatsräson*. Everything else comes afterwards.'[9] Thus Fischer sought to derive a vision for German foreign policy from the principle of responsibility for the Holocaust.

At the time, he believed that this principle meant rejecting the use of military force. But he abandoned that position after the Srebrenica massacre in 1995. Following his friend Daniel Cohn-Bendit – the star of the *événements* in Paris in May 1968 who had later moved to Frankfurt and set up Revolutionary Struggle – Fischer came to support the idea of military intervention to prevent genocide. Until then, this was a position advocated only by the centre-right; the Greens, on the other hand, saw it as a pretext for German remilitarization. But if his generation did not use all means to prevent genocide, Fischer asked in an open letter to his party that provoked a month-long debate, would they not have failed in the same way their parents had during the Nazi era?

Three years later, when Fischer became foreign minister in the red–green government led by the Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder – another *Achtundsechziger*, though one who did not share Fischer's preoccupation with the Holocaust – he had the chance to put his ideas into practice. Almost immediately, the question of what Auschwitz meant for German foreign policy came to a head with the issue of military intervention to prevent ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. The debate was especially intense among Greens, who were committed both to the idea of peace and to responsibility for the Holocaust. They seemed to face a choice between two principles: 'Never again war', which led some to oppose NATO's military

intervention in Serbia, or at least German participation in it; or ‘Never again Auschwitz’, which led others, like Fischer, to support the intervention and German participation.

The obsession with Auschwitz led to a narcissistic foreign policy debate that often seemed to be less about the region in question than about Germany itself. It was as if the point of German foreign policy were to make Germans feel good about themselves rather than to solve problems around the world. Nevertheless, although Fischer was now more defensive of Israel than he had been before Entebbe, ‘Never again Auschwitz’ remained a universalist mantra that expressed an imperative to prevent any genocide anywhere in the world. In particular, whatever the justness or legitimacy of the NATO military intervention against Serbia in 1999 – which was carried out without a mandate from the United Nations Security Council – the population that Fischer invoked the idea of ‘Never again Auschwitz’ to protect was a largely Muslim one.

**From universalism to particularism**

Although Fischer won the argument over Kosovo in 1999 – four German Tornados joined the NATO bombing of Serbia, with the support of the Greens – a consensus emerged afterwards that he had ‘instrumentalized Auschwitz’ for political purposes. Wolfgang Ischinger, then state secretary in the German foreign ministry and later the director of the Munich Security Conference, remarked that his former boss had ‘overplayed the argument in order to win domestic support’.[10] The historian Heinrich August Winkler said there was ‘no need to invoke Auschwitz’ to justify German participation in military interventions.[11] From then on, Auschwitz largely

disappeared from German foreign policy debates as it had been in the 1990s.

The exception to this, however, was Israel. Even as references to Auschwitz in foreign policy debates fell out of favour, some on the right began using the term *Staatsräson*, which Fischer had used in his 1985 article, to give a harder edge to Germany's sense of responsibility to Israel. For example, the journalist Patrick Bahners wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2002 that 'it is German *Staatsräson* that Hitler cannot be allowed to win posthumously'.[12] The Jewish people, he argued, were still surrounded by enemies – and it was as much in Germany's national interest that these enemies did not triumph as it had been to prevent a Nazi takeover of Germany itself. Thus, the Israeli national interest and the German national interest were conflated.

The red–green government came to an end in 2005, when Merkel took over as German chancellor – a position she would hold for the next sixteen years. In her speech to the Knesset three years after taking office – the first by a German chancellor – she claimed that all her predecessors had been aware of Germany's particular historic responsibility for Israel's security. 'This historic responsibility is part of the *Staatsräson* of my country', she declared.[13] By applying Fischer's term specifically to Israel, she gave the impression of continuity. In reality, she was making a commitment to Israel that no previous chancellor had – though what exactly it meant remained unclear.

Merkel's speech seems to have been influenced by Rudolf Dreßler, Germany's ambassador to Israel from 2000 to 2005, who in a 2005 essay wrote that 'a secure existence for Israel is in the German national interest and thus part of our *Staatsräson*'.[14] Merkel may not have been aware of Fischer's 1985 essay. According to *Spiegel*, her staff thought the term

sounded like hard-headed ‘Christian Democrat language’ – which, since it was Kohl who had first revived the term in 1982, was correct.[15] It was also typical of Merkel in another sense: known for her ‘there is no alternative’ approach to politics, for example in the euro crisis, she sought to take Germany’s policy towards Israel out of the space of democratic contestation and turn the commitment to Israeli security into ‘an unquestionable, no-alternative principle’, as Jürgen Zimmerer has put it.[16]

Merkel succeeded: commitment to Israel as a principle of German *Staatsräson* has since become a consensus across the political spectrum. In fact, it has increasingly been expressed in simpler terms than even Merkel had used. In 2021, the new coalition government of Social Democrats, Greens, and Free Democrats which succeeded Merkel’s grand coalition reached a carefully negotiated agreement that included the line: ‘For us the security of Israel is *Staatsräson*.’[17] Visiting Israel ten days after the October 7 attacks – by which time Israel had already dropped thousands of bombs on Gaza – Chancellor Olaf Scholz repeated the declaration.[18] (His national security adviser, Jens Plötner, had worked at the German embassy in Israel while Dreßler was ambassador.)

Since Merkel left office, there has been much retrospective criticism of her foreign policy legacy – especially with respect to China and Russia, where she prioritized economic interests over security. But since 7 October 2023, it has become abundantly clear that Merkel also left behind a disastrous legacy for German policy toward Israel. In 2009, the year after her Knesset speech, Netanyahu returned to power for the second time – and since then Israel has moved further and further to the right. As a result of Merkel’s success in making its support for Israel non-negotiable and unconditional, Germany now finds itself completely unable, or unwilling, to criticize Israel even as it expels and exterminates the population of Gaza.

**‘Zionism über Alles’**

Thus Germany’s memory culture has regressed from one which, for all its narcissism, was based on a universalist understanding of the lessons of the Holocaust, to a particularist one centred exclusively on Israel. It was the New Left that had first sought to put responsibility for Auschwitz at the centre of German identity and foreign policy. But after their universalist vision reached its peak with the justification of German involvement in the NATO military intervention against Serbia in 1999 – and subsequently produced a backlash against it – the centre-right took their language, particularly Fischer’s idea of German *Staatsräson*, and applied it narrowly to Israel alone.

What is especially strange is the way that Joschka Fischer’s successors in the Green party have not only gone along with this shift from a universalist understanding of the lessons of the Nazi past to a particularist one, but they have become the most aggressive defenders of it. Leading Green politicians like Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Economics Minister Robert Habeck are among the most supportive – and uncritical – of Israel, while also the most critical of those who criticize Israel or express solidarity with the Palestinians. Unlike the American right, however, they understand their unconditional support for Israel as an expression of anti-Nazism – in other words, as a progressive position.

Part of the explanation for this is that the German Greens are quite different from many Green parties elsewhere. The faction most supportive of Israel in what remains a very argumentative and divided party is sometimes called the ‘realists’ – a hangover from the 1980s debate between ‘realists’ and ‘fundamentalists’ over entering coalition government with the Social Democrats. But they are also the closest thing in German politics to neoconservatives, who rejected realism in foreign policy terms. Joschka

Fischer is remembered for his clash with US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which he opposed. But his successors in the Green party have a lot in common with neoconservatives – as the events since 7 October have made even clearer.

One particularly ironic aspect of this is the way that these figures are now aligned with the Springer media corporation, against whom the student movement protested in 1968. Since then, Springer has continued to support Israel and in recent years has led a number of witch hunts against critics of Israel – such as Nemi El-Hassan, a Palestinian-German journalist who was ultimately dropped by the German public broadcaster ZDF.[19] But other German media have increasingly followed its lead – even left-wing media like the Berlin newspaper *die tageszeitung*, created in 1978 to challenge the Springer empire. Springer's stance on Israel has effectively become the position of the entire German political establishment.

Springer employees are required to sign a declaration of support for Israel. In the eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt, the Christian Democrats have made a similar commitment to Israel a requirement for citizenship; other states are proposing to do the same – as if all German citizens were now Springer employees.[20] Last year, *Die Zeit* published a shocking investigative report based on leaked emails from Springer CEO Matthias Döpfner. In one of the emails, Döpfner gives a summary of his political beliefs, which ends with an extraordinary and chilling phrase that also aptly describes the political consensus that has emerged in Germany in the last few decades: 'Zionism über alles.'[21]

# Part II

# Concepts and Debates

4

# The German Catechism and Israel

*A. Dirk Moses*

Since around 2005, a new catechism has emerged in Germany, a set of five postulates that defines how the Nazi past, and Germany's identity in relation to it, is to be understood. Commitment to them is a de facto requirement for participation in public life. Those who violate them can be denounced. Central to this new catechism is Germany's commitment to Israel, its *Staatsräson* (reason of state). This has been the product of a moral revolution in the Federal Republic, from the *Historikerstreit* (historians' dispute) in the mid-1980s until the opening of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in 2005. It initially functioned in a progressive way, targeting remnants of the Nazi past. But during the last decade, it has increasingly been used to target those, especially Muslims and leftists, who do not share the official German support of Israel. Since 7 October, the catechism has been used to aggressively police criticism of Israel's assault on Gaza – exactly what it was designed to do.

## The German catechism

Concern about academic and artistic freedom in Germany has been mounting for years – especially since the German parliament's semi-criminalization of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement in 2019. In March 2020, German politicians and

journalists denounced the Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe as an antisemite for a few lines he wrote on Israel after he was invited to open a cultural festival.[1] Soon after, Michael Rothberg's book on multidirectional memory, which had just been translated into German, was attacked for relativizing the Holocaust by embedding it in colonial history.[2] A response by Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer, pleading for the legitimacy of comparative genocide studies, suffered the same fate.[3]

German liberals had sounded the alarm about this creeping illiberalism in December 2020 when leaders of cultural institutions established '*Initiative* GG 5.3 *Weltoffenheit*' to insist on freedom of expression.[4] Although these leaders rejected the BDS movement, they argued that a free society must tolerate such non-violent advocacy and that counter-boycotts were counterproductive. However, politicians and many journalists dismissed the initiative and those who signed the Jerusalem Declaration definition of antisemitism. It was against this background – which included the strange spectacle of children and grandchildren of the Nazi generation instructing progressive Jews and Israelis about Jewish identity and memory – that, in May 2021, I first wrote about the German catechism.

As I had written a book about German memory, and knew some of the protagonists engaged in the current debates, I felt it important to lay bare the deep enabling structures that had created a culture of public denunciation. As the issue was public speech, the task entailed identifying the postulates one could not violate to participate in public life. I counted five, which seemed to me to amount to a 'catechism' because I saw how they were ritually incanted and unquestioned secular articles of faith. I also observed how prominent members of the political class ('elites') guarded them against sections of the population they don't trust. Given the general

cultural Christianity of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, or educated middle class, this all looked very Christian and clerical to me.

The catechism's articles are:

1. The Holocaust is unique because it was the unlimited *Vernichtung der Juden um der Vernichtung willen* (exterminating the Jews for the sake of extermination itself) distinguished from the limited and pragmatic aims of other genocides. It is the first time in history that a state had set out to destroy a people solely on ideological grounds.
2. It was thus a *Zivilisationsbruch* (civilisational rupture) and the moral foundation of the nation.
3. Germany has a special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel: '*Die Sicherheit Israels ist Teil der Staatsräson unseres Landes*' ('Israel's security is part of Germany's reason of state').
4. Antisemitism is a distinct prejudice – and redemptive antisemitism was a distinctly German one. It should not be confused with racism.
5. Antizionism is antisemitism.[5]

At the time, it did not occur to me to relate these five articles systematically to each other – that is, to explain how they are connected. But the allergic reactions I have received from German readers of the text did so for me. The reactions made clear that their central concern was not, after all, the purity of Holocaust memory as unique or unprecedented. Rather, it was Israel, and in particular German's commitment to Israel – the vaunted *Staatsräson*, which was decreed in absolutist terms by Angela

Merkel in the Knesset in 2008 and that has informed German foreign and domestic policy ever since. Thus articles one, two, and four serve articles three and five.

For example, Ralf Fücks, the former director of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (the Green party's foundation) and now head of a liberal-conservative think tank, wrote that 'if the planned extermination of Jewry was only a sub-capital of European racism and colonial history, the special German obligation to the Jewish state is eroded'.[6] He does not explain how and why, but rather simply restates the idea of Israeli security as German *Staatsräson*: 'Merkel's statement on Israel's security as German *Staatsräson* follows our historical responsibility to the Jewish state: the unqualified advocacy for the right of existence for Israel regardless of the policies of any government'.[7]

The historian Michael Wolffsohn made similar assertions. 'The Holocaust counted as unique, at least politically, as legitimation for Israel's foundation and existence', he wrote. 'If it is now counted as one among many crimes, then Israel's legitimation is retrospectively withdrawn'. He does not explain why this should be the case, nor point out that Zionism's aim was, among other things, to normalize Jewish existence rather than to exceptionalize it. Fear drove him: 'Israel is then a state like every other, and "the" Jews can be treated like any other collective. There would be neither a special relationship nor a special responsibility for "the" Jews'.[8]

As these reactions show, the point of the catechism is to prevent criticism of Israel. The way that the articles of the catechism are related to each other by those who seek to control public debate on these topics – that is, politicians, journalists, and the ubiquitous antisemitism commissioners – mean that, if you question Germany's *Erinnerungskultur*, you will be accused of 'relativising the Holocaust' even if you do not say anything at all

about Israel. Questioning the ‘singularity’ of the Holocaust, however constructively or rigorously you do it, automatically makes you ‘anti-Israel’.

**From the *Historikerstreit* to the German catechism**

Germany’s culture of public denunciation originally developed in reaction to Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s reactionary memory politics of the 1980s. Kohl had hoped for a ‘spiritual-moral turn’ to repair the perceived damage to the national substance inflicted by the student movement and Social Democratic hegemony from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. This included resisting the incipient multiculturalism debate – Kohl declared that ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’. The conservative press, led by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, supported these forces, typified by Christian Democrat politicians like Alfred Dregger and historians like Ernst Nolte. The *Historikerstreit* began when the philosopher Jürgen Habermas denounced these tendencies in July 1986.

The debate took place at two levels: cognitively, about a critical approach to the national past, and emotionally, about whether empathy should lie with the German civilian population rather than the victims of German authorities and their collaborators, above all Jews. The famous exchange in 1987 between the Israeli historian Saul Friedländer and the German historian Martin Broszat on the ‘historicisation of National Socialism’ defined this dichotomy. Friedländer insisted that the historians of Nazi Germany must centralize the Holocaust as their standpoint in surveying the secular developments that Broszat wanted to study on their own terms. In other words, the victim’s perspective should predominate, though Friedländer meant Jewish victims rather than all victims of Nazism.[9]

These encounters were the beginning of an extraordinary moral revolution in West Germany. It was driven by a civil society movement which determined that German collective identity lay in identification with their parents' and grandparents' Jewish victims rather than with their own families. This moral energy drove not only the erection of local Holocaust memorials but also grassroots campaigns to discover the Jewish history of towns and villages.[10] The participants in the *Historikerstreit* were part of this general trend. They were what I call 'non-German Germans' – the equivalent of Isaac Deutscher's 'non-Jewish Jew', a universalist rather than nationally oriented subject.

This subjectivity was embodied by Jürgen Habermas, a '45er' (born in 1929, the end of the war in 1945 was the defining moment for him), but was generalized by the '68er' generation (those born between 1938 and 1948, for whom the student movement of 1968 was the defining moment) in confrontations with their parents and the West German state from the 1960s onwards. By the 1980s, they had relinquished hope for a socialist revolution for a post-national Federal Republic centred on Holocaust commemoration.[11] Unlike in East Germany, the victim identification was Jewish, meaning there was less discussion of other victims of Nazi racism – a blindness that would come to haunt the united Germany later.

The moral revolution began with President Richard von Weizsäcker's speech on the fortieth anniversary of 1945. The *Historikerstreit* began the following year and was consolidated by a string of controversies in the second half of the 1990s: the debate about the exhibition on the role of the *Wehrmacht* in the Holocaust; the debate about Daniel J. Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*; the debate between the writer Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis, the chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany;

and, throughout this period, the decade-long discussion about a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, passed by the Bundestag in 1999.

The *Historikerstreit* has come to assume an almost mythical status as the foundational debate of this new Berlin Republic, much like the Federalist Papers for the United States. Habermas is ascribed the role of the moral leader who explained a new ethical-political imperative: do not relativize the Holocaust. The emerging order worked according to Habermas's notion of 'dialectic of normalisation', meaning that Germany could only be a normal liberal democracy if its memory culture highlighted the abnormal national past.[12] Exceptionalism was built into the new memory culture's DNA. Germany was thought to be finally confronting its Nazi past by ceaselessly seeking out and banishing those who appeared to normalize the German past with Nolte-like arguments that relativized the Holocaust.

The German establishment is epistemologically trapped by the *Historikerstreit*'s categories and often interprets politics solely as a rerun of it. Identifying and purging perceived 'relativizers' was the means by which to protect and renew the political order. But what 'relativisation' meant remained – and remains – a grey area. Was it limited to bad-faith trivializations of the Holocaust – such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) leader Alexander Gauland's remark that the Third Reich was 'mere bird shit in over 1,000 years of successful German history' – or did it extend to historical contextualization and the relational thinking characteristic of scholarly research, like linking (though not equating) National Socialism and the Holocaust to German colonialism?[13]

**The catechism as state ideology**

While German memory culture functioned progressively in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it imported what the Romanian religious studies scholar, Mircea Eliade, called 'the terror of history' into German politics: fear of the repetition of the just-overcome past that had been discursively defeated in the *Historikerstreit*.[14] There were two pasts whose return was feared: Nazism itself, the first guilt, and the early Federal Republic, which had failed to confront it and thus incurred a 'second guilt'.[15] The prospect of their return has led to an insecurity in German political culture that mirrors the insecurity of the Bonn Republic, which was haunted by a 'Weimar syndrome' about whether it might collapse at the hands of the extreme right and left like the first German democratic experiment.[16]

This insecurity seemed like a small price to pay for a cultural and political mechanism that could make Germany a less inhumane place. For the continuing inhumanity of German ethnonationalism was evident in the shocking murderous attacks on foreign workers in Hoyerswerda in 1991, on asylum seekers in Rostock in 1992, and on Turkish Germans in Mölln and Solingen in 1992 and 1993 respectively. By thematizing the violent potential of ethnonationalism in German history, the new memory culture had the potential to work in tandem with multiculturalism.[17] The political effect of this haunting was well directed against the right of German politics in the 1990s and early 2000s, in view of the continuity of a large nationalist milieu and anti-foreigner hostility.

However, as Germany's population further diversified, its effects have catastrophized its political culture. 27.7 per cent of the German population are now of so-called 'migration background' – that is, at least one of their parents did not acquire German citizenship by birth.[18] After 9/11, the fact that many of the country's immigrant population are Muslims became a matter of increasing public policy attention, and especially after

the entry of nearly 1 million refugees in 2015, many of them from Syria. Although Muslims comprise under 7 per cent of the total population, concern about 'imported antisemitism' is particularly acute.[19] Suddenly, the political class saw threats both from the right and from the growing immigrant minority. Attacks on 'post-colonial theory' have also increased – after the collapse of the left in the 1990s, post-colonial thought seems to perform its symbolic function.

'Minority management' has thus become an imperative for the German state.[20] In the 1990s, the new *Erinnerungskultur*, or memory culture, emerging from the *Historikerstreit* had discursively empowered multiculturalism. But since around 2005, some of its proponents have increasingly directed this memory culture against migrants and refugees from the Middle East. Terrorized by history, many members of the German political class have been unable to rethink their vaunted memory culture in view of this increasing diversity. Panicked by a sense that they have lost control of memory politics, they hold fast to the *Historikerstreit* script and see in the growing pluralization and globalization of German memory a species of Holocaust relativization – and threat to the *Staatsräson*. In a debased version of totalitarianism theory, they equate the far right with the migrants and post-colonial intellectuals who the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and its supporters want to expel from the country. In doing so, they form an unintended front of white Germans against brown ones, fatally repeating destructive patterns of German history.

I was not the first to analyse this public disciplining in quasi-religious terms. Scholars and journalists had done so for years.[21] The historian Enzo Traverso had spoken about the 'civil religion of the Holocaust' in relation to the US and Europe more generally.[22] Exactly a year before my essay, the journalist Stephan Detjen used virtually the same formulation in his critique

of the attacks on Mbembe. He highlighted the chilling effect of the intervention by Felix Klein, the Federal Commissioner on the Fight against Antisemitism, who had led the campaign against Mbembe by denouncing him as an antisemite unfit to be invited to German cultural festivals. By intervening as a state official, Detjen argues, Klein was illegitimately restricting public debate and free speech. Detjen went so far as to proclaim that Klein's aim was the 'intellectual isolation of Germany as a political programme' intended to immunize Germany's memory culture from external contamination.

Detjen added these prescient words:

> Political *Staatsräson* becomes a civil religion and the antisemitism commissioners its high priests. The historically grounded statement about the unprecedentedness of the Holocaust evolves into a doctrinaire faith that is defended with state authority against heretical questioning, as if it concerns the spiritual property of the Federal Republic.[23]

Subsequent events have proven him right. The catechism functions as a governmental tool to discipline different people in different ways: some are denounced as antisemites, others passed over for jobs, while still others – including Germans of 'migration background' – are assimilated into German modernity by internalizing its precepts.

**The catechism since 7 October**

Since 7 October, the German state has gone even further in suppressing Palestine advocacy. Two months after the Hamas attack, the Bundestag debated a resolution on 'Assuming Historical Responsibility – Protecting Jewish Life in Germany'.[24] The Bundestag spent the next eight months thrashing out a text with the mediation of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.[25] It declared that this protective mission was 'an expression of Germany's *Staatsräson*' based on the 'special historical responsibility towards Jews worldwide'. Germany had a particular responsibility to Israel, to which it owed an 'unalterable promise of protection…as a secure home for the Jewish people'.[26]

The urgency for state action was the perception of increasing antisemitism in all sections of German society in the wake of the 7 October attack. Josef Schuster, the chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said that 'there is a great feeling of insecurity and fear' among Jews in Germany.[27] While acknowledging antisemitism on the right, he singled out pro-Palestine protests: 'The antisemitism that we are now experiencing is strongly formed by acts by people of Arab or Turkish descent in combination with the leftist scene.'[28] The draft parliamentary text shared this analysis, referring especially to 'Israel-related and left-wing anti-imperialist antisemitism' embedded in 'immigration from Muslim-majority countries'. These 'Islamist milieux' were 'a particular breeding ground' for 'antisemitism and hostility towards Israel'.[29]

With government condemnations of pro-Palestine university encampments and street marches as driven by 'hatred' of Jews (*Judenhass*) and of Israel (*Israelhass*) and as 'pro-Hamas', the German political class likewise regard Palestine advocacy *per se* as antisemitic. The demonstrations and encampments are thus counted as 'antisemitic incidents' along with a handful of actual antisemitic incidents – where the

perpetrators remained unknown – which have then been repeated in media reports, creating the impression of a major safety crisis for Jewish people caused by Arabs and anti-war protesters.[30] If Israel was at war, Germany stood at the ready to assist by sending weapons and neutralizing domestic opposition.

By the summer of 2024, German authorities in different states had banned protest marches and slogans like ‘From the River to the Sea’, violently dispersed events like the Palestine Congress in Berlin, and even prevented former Greek minister Yanis Varoufakis and British-Palestinian surgeon Ghassan Abu-Sittah from entering the country to attend it.[31] Universities, research foundations, and literary festivals sacked international academics from guest professorships and withdrew prizes from writers and community organizations lost their funding on the basis of social media posts.[32] The judiciary stood in the way of an even greater crackdown by reversing some bans, but could not prevent the general repression. In short, the catechism is functioning exactly as it was designed to.

5

# Two Kinds of *Staatsräson*: The Holocaust and German Colonialism

*Jürgen Zimmerer*

In January 2024, the late Namibian president Hage Geingob condemned what he called Germany's 'shocking decision' to support Israel in opposing the charges of genocide brought against it by South Africa at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).[1] He pointed out that in what is now Namibia, Germany had committed the first genocide of the twentieth century, in which tens of thousands of innocent people had died in the most inhumane and brutal conditions. Germany, he said, had 'yet to fully atone for the genocide it committed on Namibian soil'. The decision to support Israel was further evidence of 'Germany's inability to draw lessons from its horrific history'.

What was striking about the dispute was not just that Germany and Namibia were intervening on opposing sides of the case in the ICJ, but that Namibia also drew a clear connection between what was happening in Gaza – which it, like South Africa, saw as genocide – and the genocide that had been committed by Germany in Namibia a hundred years ago. By also linking this colonial crime to the Holocaust, Geingob raised questions that have been at the centre of debates about Germany's memory culture in the last few years and that have become even more fraught since 7 October.

## Liability for genocide

In 1884 Chancellor Otto von Bismarck granted protection to a station set up by, and named after, a German merchant called Adolf Lüderitz. This station later became German South-West Africa – an acquisition that was confirmed by Europe's great powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85. Between 1904 and 1908, German colonial troops waged a war of annihilation and genocide against the resisting Herero and Nama, during which an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 Herero (up to 80 per cent of the entire Herero population) and up to 10,000 Nama (50 per cent) died. After the military commander Lothar von Trotha issued an 'extermination order', thousands were left to die of thirst in the Omaheke desert.[2] Concentration camps were established all over the country to imprison the surviving men, women, and children. After the war, a racial state was established, in which the African people were supposed to serve as servants to the German 'master race'.

Germany has long rejected the use of the term 'genocide' in the context of its colonial wars. In response to a parliamentary question in 2012, the government explained that this was because the United Nations Genocide Convention only came into force in 1951 (and in the case of the Federal Republic, 1955) and was not retroactive. The statement said that international legal evaluations of 'historical events' could only be made 'using the rules and provisions of international law applicable at the time of these events and on the basis of the historical facts of the specific case'.[3] Of course, the implication of this logic also would be that the Holocaust could not be classified as genocide either. No official ever commented on that fact.

Above all, Germany opposed the term 'genocide' because it feared that this would create an obligation to pay reparations. This fear had

permeated German policy for decades. For example, in 2003 – shortly before the hundredth anniversary of the genocide of the Herero and Nama – the then foreign minister Joschka Fischer said that he would not make an 'apology relevant to compensation' for the genocide.[4] Fischer's phrase illustrated that, at least in this case, coming to terms with the past and reconciliation with the victims were secondary – the German government would only apologize for the genocide if doing so did not create an obligation to make reparations.

Thus when Germany did begin negotiations with the Namibian government in 2015, its strategy was to offer an official German apology in return for a waiver by Namibia of any demands for reparations. Ruprecht Polenz, a former Christian Democrat member of the Bundestag member and chair of its foreign affairs committee, was named as special envoy to Namibia. But when he visited Windhoek in Namibia in November 2016, a spokesperson of the Nama accused him of 'arrogance and insensitivity unbecoming a diplomat'. He had 'admonished' his Namibian counterparts and told them not to compare the destruction of the Nama and the Herero with the massacres of Jewish people. 'We are convinced Mr. Polenz's utterances are a sign of blatant racism', they said.[5]

An agreement with the Namibian government was finally reached in 2021. It acknowledged that 'the abominable atrocities committed during periods of the colonial war culminated in events that from today's perspective would be called genocide' – a wording that was designed as a way to avoid the legal consequences arising from such an admission, and above all to prevent an obligation to make reparations.[6] Although Germany committed to pay Namibia €1.1 billion over 30 years, these payments were deliberately referred to not as reparations or compensation payments, but as

‘aid’. The German government was not prepared to allow even the slightest hint that it was *obliged* to make payments.

The agreement met with enormous resistance, especially from the Herero and Nama themselves, who felt they were excluded from the negotiations, and as a result it has not yet been ratified. Further negotiations have continued behind closed doors. In 2024, Namibian Vice President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah indicated that an increase in the promised payment of €1.1 billion is now being discussed – and that an unspecified part of the payment would be made in advance. It will no longer be referred to as ‘aid’ or ‘subsidy’, but rather as a contribution to ‘atonement’ or as an ‘atonement fund’. Finally, Germany is also abandoning the ‘genocide according to today’s understanding’ wording, though it remains to be seen what legal consequences this will have – even an ‘atonement fund’ is not reparations.

Germany’s approach to responsibility for colonial crimes such as the genocide of the Herero and Nama is still ultimately focused on damage limitation rather than reconciliation with the descendants of the victims. After all, the only thing that would have been lost if the Bundestag had acknowledged the genocide of the Herero and Nama, or the German president had issued an apology, would be a bargaining chip. The German government does not seem to be making a serious effort to confront the mass violence and genocide in its own colonial history. Rather, even as demands for reparations are becoming louder, Germany aims above all to avoid liability for genocide.[7]

## The ‘singularity’ of the Holocaust as the basis of German *Staatsräson*

This is of course a different kind of *Staatsräson* than the one that is invoked in relation to Israel – and yet the two are connected. Having signed the Luxembourg Agreement – the *Wiedergutmachungsabkommen,* or Reparations Agreement, it reached with Israel and the Jewish Claims Committee – in 1952, the Federal Republic has always sought to prevent it from becoming a precedent that would require payments for other crimes that Germany had committed during its history. The discussions about the Herero and Nama genocide are a case in point; the fear centres not so much on demands for payments from Germany's former colonies but on those from its enemies in World War II – Greece, Poland, and Russia have all made reparations demands against Germany.

The idea of the 'singularity', or uniqueness, of the Holocaust can be understood as a way to contain the consequences of this precedent while still making political capital from the reparations for the Holocaust – narrowing what are to be regarded as the crimes of the Third Reich to the Holocaust and limiting the lessons to be drawn from the Nazi past. In the immediate post–World War II period, many West Germans saw themselves personally as victims rather than perpetrators: victims of the regime and its secret service apparatus; victims of the war through flight and expulsion from the eastern territories; victims of rape by soldiers of the Red Army; victims of the Allied bombing war; victims of the apparent 'victors' justice' that subsequently criminalized their behaviour; and finally as victims of a 'guilt cult' allegedly imposed from outside. It was only from the 1970s onwards that the Holocaust began to become the focus of German collective memory of the Third Reich and World War II.

Even as late as 1985, in a famous speech on the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war, President Richard von Weizsäcker had to persuade West German citizens that the end of World War II should be seen as a day

of liberation, not defeat. They accepted this in part because he offered Germans of all ages a way out of personal guilt. By externalizing Nazism, after all, you are liberated from something that is not you. The confession of crimes that finally began in the late 1970s was made easier by the fact that younger West Germans were at least partly able to move from the side of the perpetrators to the side of the victims. Thus, although the famous von Weizsäcker speech rejected historical revisionism, it did so without confronting the majority of Germans with their own guilt – or that of their parents and grandparents.

The idea that the Holocaust is ‘singular’ – often coupled with the claim that the Holocaust was the ‘worst’ crime committed by humanity – seems to fulfil a similar exonerating function when used by non-Jewish Germans. In elevating the undoubtedly monstrous nature of the crime to one that is unique in the history of the world, it is implicitly detached from German history – it is dehistoricized. The idea of the Holocaust as a uniquely evil event, representing a *Zivilisationsbruch*, or rupture in civilisation, can also be read as a rupture with history. The superlative ‘worst’ thus has the effect of evading responsibility. From a multitude of horrendous crimes, one is singled out. The ideological foundation of antisemitism does make the Holocaust different from other crimes. But focusing exclusively on it pushes other crimes with other causes to the background.

In terms of historical causation, the idea of ‘singularity’ is reductive. In reality, Nazism and the Holocaust were the product of multiple factors, ranging from social structures to militaristic, imperialistic, and eugenic ideas. Yet the evocation of ‘singularity’ makes ideology – that is, antisemitism – the Holocaust’s sole cause. Simultaneously, as the Holocaust is turned into the ultimate crime, the rest of German history, insofar as it has

nothing to do with antisemitism, is insulated from it. The corollary of this is that, as long as Germany remains committed to protecting ‘Jewish life’, other lessons from the crimes of the Third Reich fade into the background. ‘Never again’ means fighting against antisemitism, but not – for example – fighting against racism.

The physical embodiment of this narrowing of the lessons of the Nazi past is the Holocaust memorial in the centre of Berlin. The memorial’s construction in the 1990s was directly related to the decision to move the capital of the reunified Germany from Bonn to Berlin. In order to allay the fears of its neighbours, Germany wanted to symbolically show that it had been purified through a ‘confession that this united Germany acknowledges its history and that it does so by remembering the greatest crime in its history in its capital’, as Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse put it at the opening of the memorial.[8] It is significant that the German parliament decided this memorial, at the centre of its new capital, should commemorate only the Jewish victims of the Third Reich instead of all victims.

Thus the relocation of the German capital from Bonn to Berlin, and the shift of power from the West to the old centre of the German Reich, was accompanied not just by a demonstrative acknowledgement of the country’s own problematic history but also by a narrowing of perspective. The monument, Thierse said, commemorated ‘the worst, the most horrific crime of Nazi Germany’. Taking up Weizsäcker’s formulation from 1985, he said he thought of the end of the war as ‘the liberation of our country and our continent from Hitler’s barbarism’. It was as if there had been another Germany, as if Hitler alone were to blame for Nazism, as if it had not been *German* barbarism.

Merkel’s speech in the Knesset in 2008, in which she declared that Israeli security was German *Staatsräson*, must also be seen in this context.

After all, what was extraordinary about the speech was not the commitment she made to Israel's security – its right to exist had already been one of the cornerstones of German Middle East policy going back decades. Rather, it was that she linked this right to exist and security to the singularity of the Holocaust. Merkel justified German foreign policy in one of the most complex and conflict-ridden areas of international politics by referring to the obligations arising from German history and, in particular, the idea of the Holocaust as a *Zivilisationsbruch*, as a unique event. 'The breakdown of civilisation caused by the Shoah is unprecedented', she said.

**A new *Historikerstreit*?**

It is against the background of this narrowing of Germany's understanding of the Nazi past – even as it has come to be seen as having come to terms with it in an exemplary way – that a debate has taken place in recent years about how to understand the relationship between German colonialism and the Holocaust. The debate was prompted in part by articles I wrote more than twenty years ago, later collected in my book *From Windhoek to Auschwitz?* The book was published in 2011, though it is only in the last few years that its argument has been discussed beyond academia.[9]

There I argued that, forty years before the war of annihilation in Eastern Europe and the Holocaust, German colonial troops in German South-West Africa had perpetrated the first genocide of the twentieth century. I interrogated the relationship between colonialism and National Socialism, using genocide, the 'racial state', and systems of forced labour as points of departure for comparative observation. I rejected direct causality between Germany's first colonial empire (before 1914) and its second (1939–45) – Nazi crimes were not mere copies of what had

happened in German and other European colonies, as some have argued. But I identified trajectories in which colonial knowledge and practices were passed on from imperial times to that after 1933. I concluded that Nazi expansion to the East should be seen as a colonial project.

The subsequent debate about German colonialism and the Holocaust led to an intervention by Jürgen Habermas, a key figure in the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. He summarized the new debate as follows:

> The controversy of the last few months essentially revolves around one argument: If one takes into account the colonial character of the aim of Hitler's racist war of annihilation against Russia, and if one looks at the organized murder of the European Jews in this context in which it arose, one can recognize in the genocide of the Nama and Herero in South Africa by the German colonial administration those criminal traits that recurred in the Holocaust, intensified and in a different form.[10]

In the *Historikerstreit*, prompted by the historian Ernst Nolte's claim that the Holocaust was a response to Soviet terror, Habermas was among those who argued that the Holocaust was singular and accused Nolte of relativizing the Holocaust. Habermas still sees the Holocaust as 'singular'. But unlike some others in the debate who have sought to defame those who seek to identify connections between the Holocaust and colonial crimes by implying that they are relativizing the Holocaust in the same way as Nolte did, Habermas acknowledges that what is stake now is very different than in the 1980s:

> Just as all historical facts can be compared with other facts, so too can the Holocaust with other genocides. But the meaning of the comparison depends on the context. The *Historikerstreit* was about whether the comparison of the Holocaust with Stalinist crimes could relieve the Germans born later of their political responsibility … for the Nazi mass crimes … Today, under different circumstances, it is not about exoneration from this responsibility, but rather about a shift in emphasis.[11]

I think Habermas still misses the point somewhat. It is, at least for me, not about a 'shift in emphasis', but rather about a better understanding of its origins and the traditions that supported the murder of Jews and the war of annihilation. In this way, a blanket 'singularity', with its potential for misuse for exonerating purposes, can be replaced by the far more productive question of what was unique about the Holocaust and what was not. This would give antisemitism its rightful place without ignoring or excusing the general, systemic nature of violence. It would link the history of antisemitism with the history of genocide, particularly in Germany's century of violence.

However, Germany does not seem to be ready for this – or perhaps, given the narrowing of the understanding of the Nazi past that has taken place since the 1980s, it is more accurate to say that it is *no longer* ready. One illustration of this is the failure of the current government's attempt to expand its approach to commemorating German crimes.[12] When Germany's culture minister, Claudia Roth, sought to modernize the German government's official approach by including colonialism within it, she faced massive opposition from the existing institutions that focus on the

Holocaust and the crimes of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Roth, who had already been accused of antisemitism during the controversies around Documenta 15 and the Berlinale in 2024, backed down.[13]

As a result, the planned reform was scrapped, and it was decided that the existing approach should be continued. Though lip service was inevitably paid to the 'other important topics', which were to be discussed separately, the hierarchy of crimes – and, by extension, victims – could not have been clearer. While the victims of Nazism and the GDR deserve a place at the centre of German *Erinnerungskultur*, the victims of colonialism apparently do not. By first acknowledging the need to include colonial crimes and then backing down when she faced resistance, Roth has effectively cemented the second-class status of the victims of German colonialism. This amounts to nothing less than relativizing the genocide of the Herero and Nama.[14]

# 6

# The Radicalization of German Philosemitism

*Daniel Cohen*

In her Knesset speech delivered in 2008, Angela Merkel committed Germany to an *Erinnerungskultur*, or memory culture, that, as she put it, 'will also endure when the survivors of the Shoah are no longer among us'. By accepting criminal responsibility for the Holocaust as a central, permanent tenet of German democracy, she seemed to position herself as the inheritor of left-liberal traditions of accountability. Yet she also turned 'coming to terms with the past' – a progressive moral imperative that in the 1950s and 1960s was directed against collective amnesia and in the 1980s against the 'relativisation' of Germany's crimes against European Jews – into a core task of the German state. Thus *Erinnerungskultur* went from the realm of contested politics to that of national identity.

The Merkel era is the latest phase in the long history of philosemitism in post-war Germany. It has had three components: a German obligation to cultivate precarious Jewish life, to fight *Judenhass* (Jew hatred), and to stand by Israel. These three components were already in place prior to the twenty-first century. But during Merkel's sixteen years as chancellor from 2005 to 2021, they were radicalized. During this period, philosemitism became 'obsessive' and hardened into a code of conduct redefining the parameters of German respectability. *Erinnerungskultur* became a firewall against *Kulturschande* ('cultural infamy') – the shame of antisemitism

redefined as both ‘imported’ and as an anti-Zionist threat to German citizenship.[1]

Under Merkel, ‘coming to terms with the past’, which had once been a contrarian slogan, became a weapon against *Kulturschande* (‘cultural infamy’): the shame of antisemitism conceived as an ‘imported’ anti-Zionist threat to German citizenship. The elevation of the ‘special relationship’ with Israel to the rank of moral and strategic priority justified increased monitoring of ‘Israel-related antisemitism’ – a euphemism for the idea that ‘anti-Zionism is antisemitism’. In the name of mastering the past, charged A. Dirk Moses, twenty-first century Germans ‘ended up reproducing the exclusionary structures and illiberalism they were trying to overcome’ – the culmination of a history whose point of departure was the defeat of the Third Reich.[2]

**Tactical philosemitism**

After the end of the Third Reich, the first iteration of German philosemitism was above all tactical. Under the Nuremberg Laws, *Judenfreundlichkeit* (friendliness towards Jews) had been a punishable crime. But immediately after 1945, things changed as Germany was occupied and the Allies began the process of denazification. The exiled German-Jewish historian Peter Gay recalls how, as a result, the few Jews left in the country in 1945 were suddenly treated by non-Jewish Germans ‘with a kind of dirty courtesy, with conspicuous admiration for everything that Jews said, did, or believed’.[3] Yet this new *Judenfreundlichkeit* was clearly motivated by opportunism.

In September 1945, the literary scholar and diarist of distant Jewish origin Victor Klemperer was visited by the son of a non-Jewish friend, who

requested ‘an attestation that he had been favourably disposed towards the Jews despite his swastika’.[4] Klemperer had converted to Protestantism in 1912 and viewed himself as a ‘German and a communist, nothing more’. He nevertheless fulfilled the role of refereeing Jew by helping the young man obtain a *Persilschein* – the precious certificate of good behaviour. During the period of denazification, ‘everyone had his own rescued Jew’, quipped the satirical conservative writer Ernst von Salomon in his autobiographical novel *Der Fragebogen* (*The Questionnaire*).

The opportunistic revalorization of Jews during the Allied occupation stemmed from a reverse in the balance of power: proof of friendliness or admiration for things Jewish now helped vanquished Germans meet the expectations of the victors. Even before foreign visitors noticed a strange ‘philosemitic fashion’ within cultural and intellectual circles at the start of the 1960s, the mutation of German antisemitism into tactical philosemitism had already reshaped formerly negative Jewish traits into positive attributes: the Jews’ financial abilities were now an asset for economic reconstruction; their cosmopolitanism made them perfect mediators with Allied occupiers; their ‘intellectualism’ benefited the revival of German culture and science after Nazism.

German-Jewish intellectuals resented this philosemitic admiration of Jews. Hannah Arendt had already perceived the emergence of this new tendency in 1942 and saw it as ‘at best politically meaningless, and usually harmful’. Others made similar criticisms in the mid-1960s. In an article in *Die Zeit* in 1965, the German-Jewish political scientist Eleonore Sterling coined the term *Judenidolatrie* (idolatry of Jews) for a philosemitism whose seeds she thought had already been planted in the immediate aftermath of Hitler’s demise. The term *Judenfetisch* still connotes the problematic

fascination or mythologization of Jews permeating philosemitic discourses in the present.[5]

In the first and influential scholarly study devoted to West German philosemitism, which focused on the period of Allied occupation (1945–49) and the Adenauer chancellorship (1949–63), the historian Frank Stern described a ‘metamorphosis of attitudes towards Jews’ after the Holocaust as an attempt to ‘whitewash the yellow badge’. A surrogate for real confrontation with criminality, what passed as friendship traded polite declarations and monetary reparations for a clean historical sheet. Banned as racial pollution under Nazism, *Judenfreundlichkeit* allowed the Bonn Republic to pass the test of democracy. For Stern, compulsory exercises in philosemitism were ‘German therapy for German pain. The Jew became the enemy who now had to be loved.’[6] Stern’s account illuminates something of the peculiar psychology of German denial and atonement in the early years of the Federal Republic – and in particular the way in which philosemitism could, like antisemitism, rely on stereotypes. During a visit of his homeland in 1961, Norbert Muhlen, an anti-Nazi émigré of Jewish origin, took notice of a strange *jüdische Konjunktur* (Jewish trend) during the last years of Adenauer’s chancellorship. The book market was ‘saturated with works on Jewish subjects’ that disseminated a ‘new, positive image of Judaism’. Yet although this signalled a new climate, Jews now also ‘held some of the attraction that … the “noble savage” held for them in previous epochs’.[7]

The philosemitism of the Adenauer government and its immediate successor was transactional: from the Luxembourg Agreement in 1952 to the ‘normalisation’ of relations with Israel in 1965, it sought the reintegration of West Germany into the community of nations through ‘reconciliation’ with Jews. But Stern’s idea of ‘whitewashing’ reduces the

emergence of philosemitism in post-war Germany to a mere stratagem – the tactic of people who have something to hide or to confess. Yet expressions of friendliness towards Jews, Judaism, or the state of Israel in the West German public sphere of the 1950s and 1960s amounted to more than compensatory tactics.

**‘Becoming Good Again’**

For the religious, cultural, and political elites who sought moral rehabilitation through pro-Jewish friendship, philosemitism was not merely escape from guilt through *Wiedergutmachung* (‘making good again’) – the term that was used for reparations. It also served the purpose of *Wiedergutwerdung* (‘becoming good again’) through deference or special sympathy for valorized Jews.[8] In particular, for the left-leaning proponents of ‘coming to terms with the past’ in the 1950s and 1960s – including ‘45er’ intellectuals who had experienced the downfall of the Third Reich as young adults – philosemitism meant resisting German amnesia and denial of responsibility. This remained a minority position until reunification – throughout the Cold War era, polls showed that most West Germans still saw the fanatical ‘inner core’ of the Nazi regime, rather than the German population as a whole, as responsible for the annihilation of European Jews.[9]

For minoritarian atoners – socialist intellectuals, left-Christian Democrats, and remorseful Protestants – the young state of Israel played an essential function: in the absence of official Holocaust memory, the Jewish homeland became the projection screen of German expiation. Between 1953 and 1955, the first official German guests of the Israeli government, including the Protestant pastor Hermann Maas, the Hamburg publicist Erich

Lüth, and the Christian Democrat politician Franz Böhm, published enthusiastic accounts of their travels. Because ‘the Jewish question … remains the central problem of our spiritual being’, Lüth wrote in 1955, ‘Israel is the country that we must look for with our soul’. The initiator of the Peace with Israel movement in August 1951, Lüth stood among the first advocates of a special relationship between the two countries. In his mind, the Luxembourg Agreement was only a ‘first step’ towards deeper engagement.[10] ‘For us Germans’, he wrote in his travelogue, ‘the salvation of Israel in the present and the future is a crucial admonition for our own transformation’. The left-Catholic intellectual Walter Dirks similarly pleaded in 1957 for a ‘solidarity of destiny’ between Germans and Israelis. In 1960, Lüth enjoined again his compatriots to ‘love the ancient country of the new Israel’ as ‘a fate from which one cannot escape’.[11]

The left-wing Protestant Helmut Gollwitzer, who would sympathize with the West German student movement in the 1960s, told a Berlin audience in 1958 that the existence of the Jewish state should affect Germans ‘more deeply than the existence of any other country’. While cautioning against ‘setting a blind philosemitism in the place of blind antisemitism’, he said that depth of German guilt required a special bond with the Jewish survivors of Nazism. In 1958 he wrote that ‘every German who travels [to Israel] should be clear, every Jew who lives today lives not because of us but in spite of us’. Similarly, the West Berlin pastor Rudolf Weckerling advised a group of Germans visiting Israel in 1959 that ‘the heaviest baggage you are carrying with you is our guilt to the Jews’. The West Berlin theologian Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt compared visiting Israel for the first time to a ‘second baptism’.[12]

From the 1950s onwards, socialist politicians also began to visit Israel. In March 1957, the Social Democratic Party leader Erich Ollenhauer

inaugurated a ritual that would be repeated many times: a tour of kibbutzim and Israeli cities, punctuated by friendly meetings with Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion and representatives of the Labour party or the Histadrut, the Israeli trade union movement. The Social Democrat politician Carlo Schmid, the West Berlin mayor and future chancellor Willy Brandt, and members of the German trade union federation would all later follow in Ollenhauer's footsteps.[13]

Journalists, independent publicists, and members of societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation also flocked to the country from the late 1950s to 1967. The titles given to their books give a measure of their enthusiasm for Israel, which was never tempered by concern for the Palestinians who were still under military rule within Israel or made refugees in 1948: *Israel State of Hope, Homeland of the Homeless, The Desert Rejoices in the Land of David, Le-Chaim to Life, Schalom Israel*. Even if Germans had 'an inability to mourn' the Nazi past, as the psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich famously argued in 1967, German travellers to Israel had by that time already displayed an uncanny ability to love.

**From 1968 to the Berlin Republic**

The West German student movement provided a new critique of post-war German philosemitism. In 1964, the German–Israeli Study Groups, an organization that was both sympathetic to the Jewish state and close to the New Left, had already derided 'the ease with which most people in Germany' had converted 'Jewish sub-humans' into 'fellow human beings'. But this critique of German philosemitism sharpened with the student rebellion, which began in the summer of 1967 and coincided with the Six-

Day War. While older left-wing intellectuals continued to pledge solidarity with Israel, the student movement rejected what it saw as a ‘hypocritical’ philosemitism in a Federal Republic that was itself ‘fascistoid’.

In a letter to the *Spiegel* published a week after the Six-Day War, Reimut Reiche, the chairman of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS), the leading student organization, criticized the effusive support for Israel that exemplified the ‘reverse antisemitism that is being produced in the Federal Republic today’.[14] Three months later, the SDS officially veered towards anti-Zionism. At a national meeting held in early September 1967, at least one section of the movement declared the ‘Zionist state entity’ illegitimate. A call for the ‘rehabilitation of hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees back to their homeland’ likewise testified to a generational shift: unlike older left-wing intellectuals, 68ers released themselves from obligatory commitment to the state of Holocaust survivors.

Yet the years after 1968 also produced a wave of memory activism. By the time Helmut Kohl became chancellor in 1982, it was no longer only old left-wing intellectual elites but also a cohort of educators, museum workers, junior academics, journalists, and public sector employees who were committed to ‘coming to terms with the past’. The ‘new social movements’ that emerged out of the student revolt were not immune to neo-nationalism. Nevertheless, in the course of fifteen years, 1968 had produced civil society actors who were unwilling to think in terms of what Kohl called ‘the grace of late birth’. Sites of destroyed synagogues were now increasingly marked across West German cities. More plaques or memorials commemorating murdered Jews appeared in West Berlin between 1980 and 1990 than during all preceding decades.[15]

Meanwhile, during the last decade of the Cold War, the deradicalization of the student movement also entailed an acceptance of the

Holocaust as touchstone of democracy and post-nationalism. Former radicals like Joschka Fischer embraced the idea of ‘constitutional patriotism’ popularized by Jürgen Habermas. This process also included a reconciliation with Zionism. This was facilitated by the ‘peace process’ in the 1990s and the prospect of a two-state solution, which re-legitimized Israel in the eyes of former radicals who now embraced Habermasian philosemitism, and professed sympathy for a Jewish state whose ‘peace camp’ seemed imminently poised to gain the upper hand.

Some worried that this might come to an end after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Critics of German reunification feared that surging nationalism would forever relegate the Holocaust to the depths of German history. Habermas himself worried about a new ‘normality’ in the so-called Berlin Republic. Many also believed that the end of the division of Germany meant the end of German philosemitism as they knew it. ‘The philosemitic barriers cautiously accepted by the German intellectual mainstream for so many decades are now eroding’, Frank Stern wrote in 1991. Others concluded that ‘the official philosemitism of the postwar era came to an end on 9 November 1989’.[16] In fact, however, the opposite happened: unification did not stultify German philosemitism but accelerated its pace.

It is true that after reunification, competing memories of German suffering were also resurgent and challenged the central place of Jewish victims in official remembrance. Helmut Kohl’s memorialization initiatives exemplified the post-unification longing for affirmative history. A series of museums that opened in the 1990s recounted the success story of democratic West Germany or paid tribute to fallen Wehrmacht soldiers, POWs, civilian victims, German expellees, and Jews. Although they did not ignore the Holocaust, such museums celebrated the restoration of Germany as a normal nation. Thus in the early 1990s, the acceptance of the Holocaust

as cornerstone of the German political culture looked like an unrealistic prospect.

However, aware of the strategic importance of atonement for Germany's reputation in the West, even the conservative Kohl had changed course by the end of his time in office. In 1998, he declared that keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive was now the 'core of our self-concept as a nation'.[17] His successor Gerhard Schröder, the Social Democrat who led the 'red–green' coalition from 1998 to 2005, reaffirmed this point of view. 'No one can excuse himself by claiming the grace of the late birth', he announced after his electoral victory.[18] Thus the status of the Holocaust in official Germany memory culture was solidly entrenched even before the Merkel era.

The explosion of remembrance culture in the 1990s had already created a sense that Germans were the *Erinnerungsweltmeister*, or 'memory world champions'.[19] Critics of this phenomenon charged that ritualized mourning allowed Germans to recover a sense of national pride: a self-serving *Sündenstolz*, or pride in confessing one's own sin.[20] Yet moral dependency on both Jewish death (the Holocaust) and Jewish life (recent arrivals from the former Soviet Union, who began arriving in Germany in the 1990s and reinvigorated the country's Jewish population) turned philosemitism – once a defiant progressive stance – into a new marker of German identity.

## Merkel and the sacralization of Israel

Hans Kundnani argues that during the last two decades, the universalist meaning of the Holocaust – a legacy of the 1960s New Left – faded from view in favour of a particularist interpretation of the crime. Fischer's

invocation of the idea of ‘Never again Auschwitz’ in support of NATO military campaign in Serbia in 1991 was the last expression of a ‘universalist aspiration to prevent any genocide in the world’ before the Holocaust’s particularist shrinking. But if in the mind of the ex-68er converted to Atlanticism, ‘Never again Auschwitz’ was a universal creed, it was one tailored to Western liberal interventionism – a slogan which neoconservative ideologues in the United States could have easily made theirs.

The shift on the left was mirrored by one on the right. Merkel initially took the position that Helmut Kohl had for most of his long tenure: past crimes against the Jews deserved special acknowledgement, but should not deprive post-war Germans from pride in their otherwise healthy history. In 2000, just after she had become leader of the Christian Democrats, she told a journalist: ‘We should develop a natural feeling for our whole history, and then say: we are also happy to be Germans.’ But when she spoke in the Knesset in 2008, she articulated a different approach to the past. ‘I most firmly believe that only if Germany accepts its enduring responsibility for the moral disaster in its history will we be able to build a humane future’, she said.[21]

Thus, three years after she became chancellor, Angela Merkel further radicalized German philosemitism. By declaring Israeli security to be part of her own country’s *Staatsräson*, she made radical criticism of the Jewish state a threat to German rehabilitation. Several authors in this volume analyse the consequences of Merkel’s Knesset speech for German democracy, memory politics, and dissident voices in the Federal Republic. To the sacralization of the Holocaust in German political culture that had already been completed by the time she became chancellor, she added the sacralization of Israel as a key pillar of a Germanness – a ‘hyper-Zionism’

that forms part of the radicalization of philosemitism in twenty-first century Germany.

# Part III

# Cases and Consequences

7

# The Externalization of Antisemitism: Holocaust Memory and Middle Eastern and Muslim Germans

*Esra Özyürek*

For much of the history of the Federal Republic, Germans from Arab and Turkish backgrounds were seen as largely irrelevant to its *Erinnerungskultur*, its memory culture. The exclusion of racialized groups from the foundational narrative of post-war German society was not a failure but rather a calculated effort: the founders and defenders of German memory culture, believing that only an ethnically homogeneous German identity could ensure German responsibility for the Holocaust, regarded racialized groups such as those who arrived as *Gastarbeiter* – 'guest workers' – and helped to build the Federal Republic, as both external and irrelevant to the post-war public German narrative of democratization.

However, since the 2000s, this has changed as Germans from Arab and Turkish backgrounds have come to be seen as the prime obstacles to Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or engagement with the Nazi past, and its embrace of democracy now and into the future – a status as obstacle that is shared to a lesser degree by Germans from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), who are viewed as having insufficiently acknowledged and atoned for their part in the Nazi crimes. Muslim Germans are routinely accused of being unable to relate to Holocaust history, incapable of establishing empathy with its Jewish victims, and of

importing new forms of antisemitism into a country that is assumed to have dealt with its own antisemitism more or less successfully.

## Carriers of Germany's past

Over the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention programmes designed specifically for Middle Eastern and Muslim Germans, organized by federal and local governments as well as NGOs. The logic behind these programmes is that white Germans have reached their destination of redemption and redemocratization – or at least have come far enough in terms of dealing with the Holocaust to qualify themselves as judges and educators of others. Focusing on Muslims offloads the general problem of antisemitism onto the Middle Eastern–background minority which is seen as in need of extra education and disciplining. That is, it externalizes antisemitism.

The targeting of Muslim Germans for Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention is based on what I call the import–export theory of antisemitism. According to this theory, Germany exported antisemitism to the Middle East via missionaries in the nineteenth century and Nazis during the World War II. After the war, this ideology was then carried back by Muslim immigrants into a West Germany that had already overcome its antisemitism problem. The theory posits that, having worked hard to confront and overcome their antisemitism, the defeated Germans were now confronted with the same antisemitism that they had once exported, brought back into their midst by Middle Eastern immigrants. Thus, Muslims are seen as carrying Germany's past into the present.

The theory therefore involves a specific understanding of temporality and genealogy that positions contemporary ethnic Germans far along the

path that leads from antisemitism to democracy, tolerance, and empathy. In this view, Germans are assumed to have already shouldered responsibility for Germany's Nazi past, matured personally and politically during this process, and learned to empathize with their former victims. Non-Germans in Germany and around the world, meanwhile, are at much earlier stages along this path. In particular, Muslims are seen as being trapped in Germany's shameful past before 1945, which is imagined as a *Stunde Null*, or 'hour zero'.

Central to the idea of how Germany has been democratized – and Muslim Germans could be democratized – is the perceived role of authoritarian fathers within families, and the effect this is believed to have on boys. This is why Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention programmes aimed at Muslims focus so much on boys and men rather than girls and women. The authoritarian culture that pervaded Germany before 1945 is understood as a function of family structures and, in particular, the authoritarian role of the father. The key to overcoming such authoritarian family structures – and thus an essential precondition for democratization – is the rebellion of men against their fathers.

The Muslim family is thus seen as authoritarian in the same way as the German family once was. It is important to emphasize that equating contemporary Muslims with defeated Nazis of generations ago contradicts the more essentialist and racializing view that Muslims are a completely different people residing in their own time, which can never connect with that of the Germans of today. Instead, the suggestion is that Muslims are just a few decades behind Germans. If the right policies are applied to them, they can catch up. Thus the Muslim world today is imagined as closely mimicking Germany before it became sexually liberated and de-Nazified.

The Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention programmes based on the import–export theory of antisemitism aim to help Muslim Germans retrace the steps taken by post-war Germans, to unshackle themselves from the grip of their authoritarian fathers. As they liberate themselves from the authority of their fathers, and relinquish control over their sisters, they will be able to enter into the post-war German social contract. Envisioned as a linear evolutionary historicity – with Muslims at the starting point and Germans having reached the destination – this narrative then becomes a historical rulebook for learning from the Holocaust.

**Muslims and 'Israel-related' antisemitism**

About a quarter of the German population hold antisemitic prejudices, as researchers consistently demonstrate. In this, a distinction is usually made between three kinds of antisemitism: traditional antisemitism; so-called secondary antisemitism, a more recent type of anti-Jewish sentiment that has emerged since the Holocaust and is based on the idea that Jews benefit from the Holocaust and unfairly make Germans pay for it; and 'Israel-related antisemitism', a type of antisemitism that demonizes the Israeli state as an absolute evil, equates Israel with Jews and Israeli policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the Holocaust, and uses antisemitic stereotypes in critiques of Israeli government policy.

Yet, according to annual government reports, more than 90 per cent of the antisemitic crimes in Germany – most of them directed against Jewish cemeteries and buildings – are committed by far-right white Germans. No systematic study has yet demonstrated that Muslim Germans are significantly more antisemitic than non-Muslim Germans. Nevertheless,

despite the statistics, Muslims have been singled out over the course of the past two decades as the main carriers of antisemitism in Germany and throughout Europe by way of a discourse that seeks to define antisemitism as unique and wholly separate from anti-Muslim racism. In particular, Muslims are seen in Germany as being especially susceptible to 'Israel-related antisemitism'.

Evaluating this 'imported' antisemitism as more dangerous than that of the far right, German government reports on antisemitism and education attribute to Muslim German populations a putative set of culturally transmitted psychopathologies that render their nations of origin prone to antisemitism. This new struggle against antisemitism imagines a new Germany that has liberated itself from any anti-democratic tendencies surviving from the Nazi past; by locating antisemitism outside of Europe, it obscures the connections between antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism.

Although antisemitism experts in Germany often discuss Arabs and Turks as co-carriers of the new wave of antisemitism, a careful analysis of their reports and programmes demonstrates that different causes of and cures for antisemitism are ascribed to each group. Turks are assumed to be suffering from a false 'myth of tolerance' – that is, a mistaken belief that Jews were treated better in the Ottoman empire than they were in Europe. Arabs, meanwhile, are assumed to be suffering from a collective pathology of 'self-victimisation' and a 'desire for pride'. Both groups are believed to have brought these hereditary ethnopathologies from their homelands and to now be passing them on, uninterrupted, from generation to generation.

Germans of Palestinian origin have come to be seen as a particular problem and as such are the targets of many Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention programmes. Owing to their complicated legal status as stateless refugees, the actual number of Palestinians living in

Germany is hard to determine, and estimates vary from around 8,000 to 35,000. Most fled the violence they experienced in the Palestinian refugee camps during the Lebanese Civil War and the ongoing conflict with Israel. Because East Germany at the time did not require Palestinians to obtain travel visas, a considerable number of them arrived, first in East Berlin, moving later to West Berlin. This makes many of them refugees three or four times over.

Even before 7 October, the special place that Palestinian-Germans hold in the Muslim antisemitism discourse had become more prominent. After the Bundestag passed a resolution in 2019 that condemned the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign as antisemitic, restrictions were placed on the freedom of assembly and expression by Palestinian activists. In 2021, for example, Berlin authorities pre-emptively banned the celebration of Nakba Day. There have also been a number of cases of persecution of individual Palestinian-Germans, such as the journalist Nemi El-Hassan, who was fired from her job at the public service broadcaster WDR when a right-wing website published a photo of her joining an al-Quds Day protest when she was seventeen years old, and the Palestinian writer Mohammed el-Kurd, whose invitation to speak at the Goethe-Institut in Hamburg was revoked in 2022.

**The right and wrong emotions**

A key objective in Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention programmes designed specifically for Muslim Germans – and usually also run by Muslim Germans – is to get them to identify with the perpetrators. That is, to make perpetrators out of people who are marginalized, racialized, and disadvantaged in Germany. Emotional engagements by immigrants

with the Holocaust are deemed misguided when they do not correspond to the German model of the repentant perpetrator – the time-honoured and officially approved way of approaching the darkest moment in German history, which is ubiquitous across German social rituals, from political speeches to Holocaust memorials.

A particular focus of these programmes is educating Muslim Germans about the history of antisemitism in what are seen as their own cultures and histories. When they are working with young people of Turkish origin, educators provide them with evidence that Jews experienced antisemitism in the Ottoman empire and teach them about the Armenian genocide. When they are working with those of Arab and Palestinian origin, they teach them about Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, the notorious Mufti of Jerusalem who collaborated with the Nazis, to convince them that they should not think of themselves as victims in the context of the Israeli–Palestine conflict.

However, when Muslim Germans are taught about the Holocaust, educators often conclude that they are not engaging with the Holocaust in the right way. Muslim Germans tend to identify strongly with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, not least because of their sense of their racialization in German society and the recent rise of the German far right. But Holocaust educators often see this as the wrong emotional response. In their view, Muslim Germans who identify with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust are competing with them for victim status – or even being antisemitic by undermining the ‘singularity’ or ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust.

Some German Holocaust educators do welcome the way that recent immigrants and refugees relate their own experiences with war to the Holocaust – unless, that is, their experiences of war took place in Palestine.

But Muslim Germans are not expected to connect their experiences in marginalized minorities in Germany today to the Holocaust. When Muslim Germans express fear that something like the Holocaust might happen to them, they are judged to be lacking in the cognitive skills required to understand how different today's Germany is from that of the 1930s. Muslim Germans must adopt the position of the perpetrators in order to repent – a necessary condition for entering the German social contract.

There is a sense in which Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention programmes give young Muslim Germans an opportunity to include themselves in the German narrative and moral order. Through affiliation with the German perpetrator, space is opened for immigrants to enter into Holocaust memory discourse. If they publicly and sincerely perform guilt and responsibility, the Muslim minority can be accepted as proper members of German society. At the same time, however, they are prevented from positioning themselves as victims in relation to white Germans. In other words, they are compelled to engage with the Holocaust in relation to their own forebears, but not in relation to German racism. Hence, while incorporating them into this foundational narrative of the nation, initiatives that aim to educate Muslims on the Holocaust also exclude them.

**Auschwitz as pilgrimage and shock therapy**

Organized trips to Auschwitz play a prominent role in German Holocaust education, functioning as a kind of civil religious pilgrimage. But in the case of Muslim Germans, however, such trips also serve to finally invite them – as immigrants, or the children and grandchildren of immigrants – into a post-war national German civil religion from which they have been

excluded. The aim is to transform young Muslim Germans, who are seen at best indifferent to, and at worst hostile towards, Holocaust memory, into reliable and unswerving witnesses of the need for democracy, empathizers of Jewish victimhood, and defenders of a strong Israel that protects Jews in a world that is hostile to them. In other words, to turn them into deserving German citizens.

Beyond serving as a civil religious pilgrimage, visits to Auschwitz also function as a form of shock therapy for Muslim Germans, designed to shake them out of their antisemitism and instil in them the 'right' kinds of feelings toward Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The idea is that visitors will be transformed simply by standing physically in a space where horrific crimes took place. Once there, they cannot possibly avoid its reality. For example, the organization Muslims in Auschwitz seeks to bring about an inner transformation in its participants by having them embrace the emotional position of being a potential or repentant perpetrator, thereby affiliating themselves with white Germans in whose name the Holocaust was committed.

Israeli and Jewish-American visitors to Auschwitz are not expected to be shocked by encountering a reality different from what they already know to have happened. Rather, by witnessing the suffering of their ancestors, Jewish participants expect – and often experience – a strengthening of their commitment to the Jewish community, an outcome common to most pilgrimages. An organized Muslim-minority German trip to Auschwitz, on the other hand, assumes invariably that visitors will be radically transformed through the shock the space will trigger. It assumes that in order to be aligned with their fellow German citizens, Muslim minorities are in need of a treatment powerful enough to bypass their commonplace beliefs.

The expectation of being transformed – and of having a strong emotional reaction – is so strong that many visitors, especially Muslim Germans, feel anxious beforehand about not having the right kind of emotional reaction. What they often do have is a strong inter-subjective connection with the Jewish victims. By engaging with the Holocaust, they can reflect on being German, but it does not always lead them to identify with the white German majority.

Participants in the Muslims in Auschwitz project hope to demonstrate with the Holocaust to white Germans; they hope that white Germans, too, will be shocked and transformed when they see how readily and intensely minorities engage with the German past and learn its moral lessons. For German society, Muslims who visit the German past and shoulder its burdens serve to lighten the burden placed on German shoulders. The guilt is redistributed by Muslim Germans admitting that they too are guilty of antisemitism, and that their ancestors collaborated with the Nazis. But this does not necessarily mean that they will be taken as full Germans and that differences in ethnic background will be forgotten.

**Conditional inclusion**

Since 7 October, there has been a massive expansion of this German externalization of antisemitism. In a video posted on social media in November, the Economics Minister Robert Habeck said that ‘too few’ Muslim organizations in Germany had spoken out against the attack on Israel; some were ‘too hesitant’ to do so. ‘They must clearly distance themselves from antisemitism in order to avoid undermining their own demand for tolerance’, he said. A week later, the German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, followed with a similar message to Germans ‘with Arab

roots’ to reject antisemitism and not allow themselves to be ‘instrumentalized’ by Hamas.

The message that Germany sends to Muslims is that their inclusion in German society is conditional. In particular, their entitlement even to the constitutional rights that Germany grants all citizens and residents is conditional on their willingness to take on German guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust – and, as a corollary, to pledge allegiance not only to Germany but also to Israel.

8

# The Crisis of German Culture

Hanno Hauenstein

Since 7 October 2023, there has been a surge of collective hysteria in Germany over anything that academics, artists, protesters, students, or writers, have said, written, or posted regarding Israel or Palestine. In the name of ‘historical responsibility’, high-profile German politicians and institutions have cancelled events, conferences, exhibitions, prizes, and even planned tenures so routinely that writing about it feels like being trapped in a vicious loop. Non-German voices – Palestinian or Jewish – have been disproportionally targeted. In response, some have begun to publicly boycott Germany, not only in protest against its military support of Israel’s war on Gaza, but also in opposition to this growing internal repression.

The impetus driving these cancellations and their increasing normalization was the Bundestag’s resolution on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement in 2019. Since then, freedom of speech and the plurality of perspectives have been subordinated to a one-dimensional commitment to German *Staatsräson*. One of the first high-profile cases following the BDS resolution was the cancellation of an address by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe at the Ruhrtriennale, an arts and music festival in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia, in 2020, which prompted a prolonged, widespread public debate.[1] Since then,

Germany's discourse on these issues has turned increasingly shrill – and, at times, almost incomprehensible for outsiders.

**Turmoil as the new normal**

The Documenta exhibition, held every five years in Kassel, central Germany, since 1955, was originally created as a way for Germany to differentiate the new Federal Republic from the Third Reich and to promote the very avant-garde art that the Nazis rejected as 'degenerate' – even though, in reality, many of those who founded the Documenta had themselves been Nazis or had been deeply involved with the Nazi regime.[2] But in the last few years the Documenta has been at the centre of a series of controversies over whether artworks and perspectives that are critical of Israel are antisemitic. How did an exhibition created to show the world that Germany had learned the lessons of the Nazi past and embraced free cultural expression now find itself accused of suppressing that same freedom?

The controversies began in the summer of 2022, when Gazan artist Mohammed Al Hawajri was about to unveil a series of collages for Documenta 15. The title of the work was *Guernica Gaza* – a reference to Picasso's famous 1937 anti-war painting. Al Hawajri's work depicted bomb blasts, which were widely interpreted as Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. But in Germany, the implication of a comparison between the Nazi bombing of Guernica and Israeli air strikes on Gaza was enough to produce a wave of condemnations and accusations of antisemitism; the Kassel public prosecutor even began investigating potential criminal conduct. A report produced by an expert commission a few months after the exhibition confirmed that Al Hawajri's work was supposedly antisemitic.[3]

Al Hawajri was not the only artist to be accused of antisemitism during Documenta 15. The entire exhibition, curated by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa, became a battlefield in Germany's struggle to distinguish between critical views of Israeli policies and overt, indefensible antisemitism – identified in at least one artwork during the exhibition. Most of the artists who were accused of antisemitism were cultural workers from the so-called Global South. At the end of last year, the entire finding committee for Documenta's upcoming edition resigned, in part because of new accusations of antisemitism against Indian committee member Ranjit Hoskoté, for signing a statement in 2019 calling Israel a 'settler-colonial-apartheid state'.

Since the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, the turmoil of culture wars that engulfed the Documenta 15 has become the new normal in Germany's art world and cultural sector. One of the most publicized cases was that of the Jewish South African artist Candice Breitz, who has repeatedly and explicitly condemned the Hamas attack on 7 October, but who has also publicly criticized Israel's military campaign against Gaza. The board of the Saarland Museum eventually cancelled a planned exhibition of her work. In a press release explaining the decision, the Saarland Cultural Heritage Foundation stated that it would not provide a platform for artists 'who do not recognize the terror of Hamas as a *Zivilisationsbruch* or who consciously or unconsciously blur the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate actions'.[4]

However, while Breitz's was the most publicized case, there were dozens of similar cancellations at galleries and museums around Germany as they sought to police criticism of Israel. In November, the Museum Folkwang in Essen cancelled an exhibition titled 'We ist Future' because of Instagram posts by the Haitian curator, Anaïs Duplan, which described

Israel's actions in Gaza as genocide and called for a boycott of Israel. All while the museum continued to promote an online art collection that was co-founded by, and named after, Gustav Krupp, one of the main defendants in the Nuremberg trials, who is to this day still prominently praised on the museum's website – an association that has caused no similar outrage.

Turmoil also became the new normal in the film world. At the Berlinale, Germany's most prestigious annual film festival, the Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham and the Palestinian filmmaker Basel Adra received an award for their documentary *No Other Land*. Standing side by side during the award ceremony, Abraham used the term 'apartheid' to describe the divergent realities he and Adra faced at home. Adra went on to implore Germany to stop arming Israel. This produced an immediate wave of condemnations from German political figures such as the Berlin mayor Kai Wegner ('unacceptable relativisation') as well as Berlin's culture minister Joe Chialo ('anti-Israel propaganda').[5] Germany's federal minister of justice Marco Buschmann raised the possibility of legal repercussions.[6]

One of the more absurd aspects of the Berlinale controversy involved the German culture minister Claudia Roth, a member of the Green party. After the award ceremony, the staunchly pro-Israel tabloid *Bild*, which is owned by the Axel Springer corporation, attacked her for clapping during the prize presentation to Abraham and Adra.[7] In response, Roth's office issued a clarification in which she said that her applause was directed at the 'Jewish-Israeli filmmaker Yuval Abraham', not at the Palestinian co-director Adra – reinforcing the very discriminatory logic her applause was ostensibly opposing.[8] After Israeli media outlets picked up the story, Abraham and his family faced threats from right-wing extremists in Israel, and both he and Adra had to delay their return flights home.

Later that year, in November, I myself moderated one of the first public screenings of *No Other Land* at Berlin's renowned Akademie der Künste art institution. A digital live conversation with Abraham and Adra followed the screening. Just moments before, news had circulated on social media that cast a shadow over the event. The Berlin municipality's official website, along with those of several other German cities where the film was publicly announced, had falsely described it as exhibiting 'antisemitic tendencies' – a framing that was later retracted.

Speaking with me via Zoom, Abraham reminded the audience that after German politicians had incited against the filmmakers, his family in Israel had to leave their home for days due to death threats. He went on to say that, as a Jewish Israeli and left-wing activist, he felt unsafe and unwelcome in Berlin. Fighting back tears, Abraham addressed the audience:[9] 'To hear the way you are weaponizing antisemitism while Gaza is being ethnically cleansed – to hear you use the deaths of my own family to legitimize this, to accuse us of antisemitism when we are standing here non-violently, fighting for justice for both Israelis and Palestinians, speaking about the roots of the violence, which is Israel's military occupation – I'm in tears right now because I think it's so shameful, so wrong, so unjust. History is knocking at Germany's door again, and you are failing. You are failing.'

**A climate of fear**

In Germany, more than in most other Western countries, culture is publicly funded. Germany's extensive network of cultural institutions is far less frequently subsidized by private patrons than in the United Kingdom or the United States. In 2020, German state funding of museums, theatres, cultural

exchange programmes, and artists totalled €14.5 billion ($15.5 billion). In Berlin alone, the proposed cultural funding for 2024 amounts to nearly €1 billion ($1.1 billion) – more than the total public funding for all of England. Prestigious cultural events like the Documenta and the Berlinale are also funded by either the national or state government – Documenta 15 in 2022 received €42.2 million ($45 million) in state funding.

It is this state funding that has allowed the legally non-binding BDS resolution to have such a large and immediate impact on German culture.[10] In order to avoid the risk of losing funding, cultural institutions have swiftly adapted to the norms on antisemitism and criticism of Israel set by the German government. In particular, over the past five years, they have informally incorporated the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism into their funding procedures. As a result, German cultural institutions now often treat anyone who challenges Israeli policies – especially those using terms such as ‘apartheid’ and genocide’, seen by many as ‘relativising’ the Holocaust or delegitimizing Israel’s ‘right to exist’ – as a threat to their funding.

Until recently, German politicians had refrained from seeking to influence the opinions of the individuals and initiatives they fund. In a country renowned for its robust support of the arts, the recent wave of cancellations of individuals – along with the ousting of the cultural hub Oyoun in the Neukölln neighbourhood of Berlin due to its unwillingness to cancel an event with the German counterpart of Jewish Voice for Peace in 2023 – shocked many in the German cultural sector. The fear that artists may lose funding and opportunities for holding certain views, or supporting political strategies on Israel–Palestine that diverge from the official state narrative, is thus beginning to cast a shadow on Germany’s reputation as a post-war bastion of free expression.

This is certainly how many artists themselves see it. Candice Breitz told me she believes that German institutions are ‘increasingly prioritizing cultural workers who are compliant with mainstream state narratives and don’t ask too many critical questions’ and that the country’s public funding system ‘is being steadily eroded as the country continues to shift to the right’.[11]

‘The intimidation tactics work’, Berlin-based American musician Nicolás Jaar told me. ‘I’m seeing people self-censor to continue being able to show their work’, Jaar said.[12] (He was himself accused of being ‘pro-Hamas’ after criticizing a White House press release about the 7 October attack in an Instagram story.)

Some German cultural institutions have sought to resist this climate of fear and censorship. After the Mbembe controversy in 2020, a group of artists, cultural workers, and cultural institutions in Germany issued a joint statement in which they publicly criticized the Bundestag’s BDS resolution for fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship.[13] The collective included institutions that themselves rejected BDS, including the Goethe-Institut and the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. They have since joined forces with the so-called Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit, an association of German cultural bodies that see the ‘logic of boycott’ triggered by the resolution as ‘dangerous’.[14]

A senior representative from a major cultural institution in Germany told me that Germany’s reputation as a country in which cultural expression is free is now at risk of being completely destroyed. They noted a pervasive sense of fear in the sector – people working for cultural institutions fear losing their jobs, and artists fear losing funding. ‘Everyone’s afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing.’[15] It has become standard practice to vet artists or cultural workers by checking their social media posts. ‘Everyone

has internalized the rules and is watching each other. That's the direction this is heading.' For many involved in the German cultural scene, open dialogue now seems impossible. 'That's why so many people are currently talking about McCarthyism.'

**Attacks on academics and writers**

This McCarthysim has also impacted academics and writers critical of Israel. A week after the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, the Frankfurt Book Fair cancelled a planned award to Adania Shibli, a Palestinian writer, whose novel *Minor Detail* tells the true story of the rape and murder of a Palestinian Bedouin girl by Israeli soldiers in 1949.[16] Originally published in Arabic in 2017, the novel was widely acclaimed – the English edition of the book, published in 2020, was longlisted for the Booker Prize. But last summer a journalist working for the German public service broadcaster WDR resigned from the jury for the LiBeraturpreis after it decided to give Shibli the award. After 7 October, a fresh wave of criticism led to the cancellation of the ceremony.

One of the most publicized cases in Germany involving a writer was that of Masha Gessen, who was awarded the Hannah Arendt Prize at a ceremony in Bremen in December 2023. Shortly before, Gessen – whose great-grandfather was murdered in a Jewish ghetto in Poland – had written an extensive essay for the *New Yorker* in which they compared Gaza to such a ghetto rather than an 'open air prison', as the British prime minister David Cameron had described it.[17] A German pro-Israel lobbying group attacked Gessen for the comparison, which prompted the Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with Germany's Green Party and one of the organizers of the

prize, to pull out. (Gessen eventually received the award at the ceremony without the participation of the Böll Foundation.)

There have also been several cases in which positions have been withdrawn from leading academics because of the way they criticized Israel. In February, the Lebanese-Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage was fired from a visiting fellowship at the Max Planck Institute. In April, Cologne University withdrew a visiting fellowship from New School philosophy professor Nancy Fraser after she signed a letter in solidarity with Palestine.[18] In November, the Australian political theorist John Keane, one of the world's leading experts on democracy, resigned from the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB) after it had demanded an explanation for social media posts he had made on 7 October, which it thought suggested he was a Hamas supporter.[19]

In addition to cancelling individuals, the German state has also attempted to shut down conferences. In April 2024, the Palestine Congress in Berlin was violently suppressed. Europe-wide travel bans were imposed on Ghassan Abu-Sittah and Yanis Varoufakis, who were supposed to participate in the Congress.[20] Germany blocked Abu-Sittah, a renowned surgeon who had practised in Gaza during the first months of the war, from entering the country to deliver a speech at the conference. Abu-Sittah said that German officials told him that if he were to attempt to participate remotely – or even just sent in a video message – it would constitute a criminal offence for which he could be fined or imprisoned for up to one year.[21] In early 2025, Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU) cancelled a scheduled lecture by UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine Francesca Albanese on 'colonialism, human rights, and international law' shortly after it was announced.

As in the United States, student protests on university campuses have been shut down – often violently. In early May 2024, riot police cleared a pro-Palestinian student camp at the Free University in Berlin, which had been set up in protest against the then-imminent Israeli invasion of Rafah. In response, a group of over a hundred university lecturers wrote an open letter in which they argued that the university leadership should instead pursue dialogue and non-violent solutions. *Bild* reacted with an article calling the signatories – including renowned Holocaust researcher Michael Wild and migration studies professor Naika Foroutan – 'Universitäter' (a contraction of the German words for 'university' and 'perpetrators').[22]

In an interview with *Bild*, Germany's education minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger also condemned the letter by the group of lecturers and professors. 'Instead of taking a clear stand against hatred of Israel and Jews, university occupiers are made victims and violence is trivialized', she said.[23] An investigative report by the German television programme *Panorama* later revealed that the education ministry had explored whether funding could be withdrawn from lecturers who had signed the letter.[24] According to a subsequent report, the ministry had compiled lists of university lecturers who were not aligned with the government's political stance on these matters. Amid growing pressure to resign, Stark-Watzinger instead dismissed her state secretary, Sabine Döring, who she blamed for the inquiry.

A particular target of these attacks on universities has been post-colonial studies, which is increasingly seen in Germany as being inherently antisemitic. What is striking, however, is that it is not just right-wing media such as *Bild* that have criticized individual post-colonial thinkers or the concept of 'post-colonialism' as such, but also left-wing newspapers like *die tageszeitung*, better known as the *taz* – the Berlin newspaper which was

set up in 1980 by veterans of the West German student movement to provide an alternative to the Springer press as part of what they called a *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, or ‘counterpublic sphere’. When it comes to discourse on Israel, Palestine, and antisemitism, the usual political differences often appear completely dissolved and replaced by an extraordinary consensus.

Yet much of this discourse – including the attacks on post-colonialism – is being driven by the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Much like far-right parties elsewhere, it couches its hostility toward immigrants – particularly those from Muslim-majority countries – within the narrative of ‘imported’ antisemitism, while positioning itself as a staunch defender of Israel.[25] In 2022, the AfD demanded that the German government ‘draw conclusions from the antisemitism scandal at the Documenta and immediately stop promoting post-colonialism’.[26] Another AfD motion in July 2024 called for federal funds to ‘combat post-colonial ideology’ in the Global South.[27] It is as if Germany’s liberal centre is doing the AfD’s dirty work.

In early 2025, the German Bundestag passed another non-binding resolution – praised by the AfD – aimed at combating antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment in schools and universities, while also specifically referencing the cultural sector as well as journalism.[28] Backed by the Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Greens, Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP), and the AfD, the resolution primarily blames organizations it deems sympathetic to Islamist ideologies and claims university protests have spread anti-Israel and antisemitic slogans.

The resolution also explicitly cites the Berlinale film festival as an example of antisemitism but makes no mention of Germany’s deadliest recent antisemitic attack: the 2019 attempted massacre at a synagogue in

Halle, where a far-right extremist sought to kill Jewish worshippers on Yom Kippur, instead murdering two people, one in a nearby kebab shop. Numerous academics, Jewish intellectuals, and human rights organizations have publicly criticized the resolution, warning it could suppress criticism of Israel's policies – especially amid its genocidal campaign in Gaza – and restrict open discourse in academia and culture.[29] Despite these concerns, it passed with support virtually all established parties, highlighting concerns over academic and cultural freedom in the wake of a politicized debate over how to best fight antisemitism.[30]

**A boycott of Germany?**

In response to the climate of censorship and fear that has been produced in Germany, academics, artists, and writers are increasingly avoiding the country altogether. A representative of a leading German cultural institution reported that several artists have recently cancelled projects – and there are fears they 'may choose to distance themselves from us altogether'. An initiative called 'Strike Germany' has called for a cultural boycott of German institutions until the country ceases its support for Israel's assault on Gaza and stops weaponizing the IHRA definition of antisemitism in order to suppress criticism of Israel.

Many now see boycotting Germany as the only way to effectively shame it. Bosnian writer Lana Bastašić cut ties with her German publisher because of the genocide in Gaza and the censorship in the country.[31] Lebanese musician Sharif Sehnaoui and British-Iraqi musician Khyam Allami have declared that they would reject invitations and boycott German-funded cultural projects.[32] Indian author Suchitra Vijayan said she was boycotting Germany because of 'what is happening in Palestine'.[33]

Oxford University professor Nikita Sud declined a request from a German research council to review a major funding application because of German institutions' attitudes toward Israeli violence against Palestinians.[34] There are many other examples like this.

In its quest to protect Jewish life – often conflated with defending Israel, no matter how right-wing its government has become – Germany is ceasing to be the bastion of free expression and dialogue it once was. It is increasingly a space where non-Germans, and especially people from the Global South, who dare to challenge Germany's narrative of historical redemption are policed and admonished. Many now fear a future in which cultural life in Germany is once again going to become increasingly white and increasingly German. Thus Germany risks regressing into a kind of conformity reminiscent of the very past it sought so hard to leave behind after 1945. As Breitz puts it, Germany is 'slipping back towards the past'.

9

# *Staatsräson* Against the Rule of Law

*Nahed Samour*

The term *Staatsräson* is neither used in Germany's *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) nor found in any statutory provisions of German law. In 2023, the Bundestag's research service confirmed that the term should not be understood as a legal or doctrinal concept but as a guiding principle of German foreign policy.[1]

However, while *Staatsräson* is not a legal term, it has had increasingly wide-ranging legal consequences. With respect to domestic affairs, the term *Staatsräson* was formally introduced in 2024 in a motion for a resolution – 'Never again is now – protecting, preserving and strengthening Jewish life in Germany' – by Germany's centre, left, and liberal parties.[2] This was followed by another parliamentary resolution in 2025 that specifically called to 'resolutely counter antisemitism and hostility towards Israel' in universities and schools.[3] Neither of these resolutions constitutes law, but both are slowly seeping into jurisdiction. Thus, we are witnessing the gradual introduction of *Staatsräson* as a legal term (*Recht*) despite its lack of formal legal status (*Gesetz*).

The term thus remains opaque in its meaning, interpretation, and application, creating uncertainty about what is and is not legal in Germany. It functions as 'soft law' that can facilitate infringements on fundamental rights and breaches of international law, ultimately undermining liberal rule

of law in Germany and the Federal Republic's traditionally favourable relationship with international law, as enshrined in its constitution.[4]

**A guiding principle with legal consequences**

Before *Staatsräson* gained any legal traction, it began as a guiding principle in German foreign policy.[5] In June 2012, after Chancellor Angela Merkel used the term in connection with Germany's relationship with Israel at the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, and again in the Knesset in 2008, her government was asked about its meaning in a parliamentary question. In response, the government stated that the concept referred to Germany's historical and political responsibility for the 'security and existence of Israel', and that it shaped and guided German foreign policy decisions.[6] More recently, the concept has been applied not only to the security and existence of Israel but also to the protection of Jews in Germany. There is now a dialectic between the foreign and domestic policy dimensions of German *Staatsräson*.

Although it is only a policy, it has since found substantive expression in German law, as the Bundestag's research service acknowledged.[7] In particular, it refers to the prohibition against *Volksverhetzung* (incitement to racial hatred) in the German criminal code, which states that, in sentencing, a court 'may take into consideration the offender's motives and objectives, including racist, xenophobic, antisemitic or other motives evidencing contempt for humanity'. Similarly, according to German citizenship law, naturalization may be refused if the applicant has committed minor criminal offences with an antisemitic motive.[8]

The legal consequences of *Staatsräson* quickly became evident after 7 October 2023 with the suppression of public dissent against Israel. In

October 2023, over 800 scholars and practitioners of international law, conflict studies, and genocide studies from around the world signed a public statement warning of the possibility of genocide being perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.[9] A month later, attesting to a 'genocide unfolding', the UN Special Rapporteurs raised clear alarm bells.[10] But on the streets of Germany, opposing what some citizens and residents saw as genocide (as one could infer from their use of the dictum 'Never again!') became a criminal offence – or at least that is how the police saw it.

In particular, in a series of cases soon after 7 October 2023, people protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza were accused of incitement to racial hatred – a charge based on the widespread tendency by the German police to conflate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. As Felix Klein, the federal antisemitism commissioner, put it: 'If you accuse Israel of genocide, you are clearly acting in an antisemitic way because you are demonizing Israel, applying double standards, and accusing the Jewish state, of all people, of a genocide like the Shoah.'[11] This conflation was also evident in Germany's statement declaring its intention to intervene in the genocide case brought by South Africa against Israel before the International Court of Justice.[12]

These official statements are mirrored in how incitement laws were used on the streets of Berlin. In November 2023, when Palestine solidarity protests had been almost completely banned – so-called *Vorabverbot* (preventive prohibition) – a Jewish and Israeli woman, Iris Hefets, was stopped from walking the streets of Berlin holding a banner that read: 'Als Jüdin und Israelin sage ich: Stoppt den Genozid' ('As a Jew and as an Israeli I say: Stop the Genocide'). While the *Vorabverbot* had by then been in effect for over three weeks in Berlin, and for two months in Hamburg, the Berlin laws on protests declared that assembly was constituted by at

least two persons; a person walking on the street alone could not be banned from showing a banner. Instead, Hefets was charged by the police with incitement to racial hatred, and the banner was confiscated.

In March 2024 – five months later – the Berlin prosecutor's office finally dropped the charges against Hefets. But during that time it remained unclear whether protesting the genocide in Gaza would lead to criminal charges or not. Lawyers had to tell their clients that, to be on the safe side, they should not hold similar banners – especially if they were not German citizens, and thus risked having their residence permit revoked, or even being deported. Thus what *Staatsräson* meant in practice on the streets of Berlin was that protesting against genocide was considered an act of incitement to racial hatred.

In another case, in November 2023, the Palestinian community in Cologne was prevented from holding a protest under the heading 'Stop the genocide in Gaza'. The community was told by the police that a protest could not be registered if it was run under a slogan that incited racial hatred – as 'Stop the genocide in Gaza' was viewed as doing. The Palestinian community went to court to ask for the ban to be lifted. The following month, the administrative court of Cologne rejected the police's decision to ban the protest as 'manifestly unlawful'. The ruling stated:

> When interpreting and applying the criminal norms, authorities and courts must observe the constitutional requirements to be derived from the right to freedom of expression under article 5, paragraph 1, sentence 1 of the German Basic Law, so that the value-setting significance of the fundamental right is also brought to bear at the level of the application of the norm in the specific case. In addition,

> article 5, paragraph 1, sentence 1 of the Basic Law gives rise to specific requirements for the interpretation of disputed statements prior to the interpretation and application of the law. The aim of the interpretation is to determine the objective meaning of a statement. The decisive factor is therefore neither the subjective intention of the person making the statement nor the subjective understanding of those affected by the statement, but rather the meaning that it has objectively according to the understanding of an unbiased and reasonable audience.[13]

The Cologne court's view was influenced by multiple rulings of the German constitutional court to the effect that statements with several plausible meanings are protected by freedom of speech if at least one of the meanings is not punishable.[14] The idea is that courts should give utmost respect to freedom of expression.

Despite these court rulings against the automatic assumption that speaking of genocide in Gaza constitutes incitement to racial hatred, the authorities have continued to their attempts to prevent any such accusations being made against Israel. In December 2023, the police in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia published what it called an 'Information Brochure for Schools, Teachers and Parents on the Middle East Conflict'.[15] It contained information aimed primarily at educators about possible criminal offences, stated that 'describing the actions of Israel or the Israeli armed forces as genocide' can fall under the criminal offence of incitement to racial hatred, and encouraged teachers to file criminal charges against their own students.[16]

**Foreigners out**

Since 7 October, Germany's federal police issued entry bans for foreign citizens, specifically European citizens, who are critical of Israel. The former Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, and the British-Palestinian physician and rector of the University of Glasgow, Ghassan Abu-Sittah, were both banned from Germany after attempting to attend the Palestine Congress in Berlin in April 2024, organized by DiEM25 and its political party MeRA25, headed by Varoufakis, and Germany's Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East.[17] While Varoufakis had not intended to attend the Congress in person in the first place, the police even prevented him from taking part in the conference remotely.[18] Abu-Sittah was also subsequently turned away at airports in the Netherlands and France because of Germany's membership of the Schengen border-free area.

Given the significance of the fundamental right to freedom of expression, which both European Union citizens and non-EU nationals enjoy, statutory restriction represents a serious curtailing of basic democratic freedoms. A ban can be stigmatizing for the foreign national affected and is likely to diminish the person's public reputation. But as with the attempts to prevent demonstrations in the name of preventing incitement to racial hatred, lawyers have doubted the legality of these measures from the beginning.[19]

Crucially, the federal ministry of interior, in ordering the entry ban and the bans on speech, risked even violating EU law. EU citizens who are not German nationals have a right of entry and residence in Germany that arises directly from Article 21(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). But EU law does allow for the imposition of restrictions on an EU citizen's entry to another EU member state in accordance with the conditions laid down in the German law that

implements the EU directive that guarantees freedom of movement. In accordance with these provisions, an EU member state may refuse entry to a citizen of another EU member state (including the UK) on grounds of public policy, public security or public health. On this basis, the German federal police can issue an alert barring a citizen of another EU member state from entering the country.

However, the term ‘public safety’ in EU law, and in the German provision implementing the free movement directive, must be interpreted solely in light of EU law rather than German law. In fact, according to the general rule that exceptions to EU law must be applied and interpreted very restrictively, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) interprets this right to refuse entry to EU citizens very narrowly. In fact, it has insisted that even a non-EU citizen must represent ‘a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat, affecting a fundamental interest of society’ in order to be considered a threat to public security and thus to be refused entry.[20]

The refusal to allow Abu-Sittah, a British citizen, to enter Germany was based on the logic usually applied to non-German and non-EU citizens. German court rulings banning the political activity of non-EU citizens have been based on Section 47 of the Residence Act, which refers to public safety and, importantly, the foreign policy interests of the Federal Republic. These provisions were famously used against the Iranian students who protested against the visit of the Shah to West Germany in 1967 as well as more recently against Kurds and Palestinians – that is, they have often been used against racialized individuals and communities, and they reflect Germany’s foreign policy interests.[21]

In June 2024, two months after the Palestine Congress took place, the administrative court of Potsdam decided on the illegality of the ban against Abu-Sittah.[22] In fact, it is only through this ruling that we know that his ban

was made with reference to the paragraph of the German criminal code against incitement to racial hatred and that the German authorities referenced an initial suspicion (*Anfangsverdacht*) based on his social media posts. But the court noted that the prosecutor had substantiated neither the accusation of incitement of racial hatred nor the claim that Abu-Sittah was either a member of Hamas or of the People's Front for Liberation of Palestine, two organizations that the German ministry of interior banned in October 2024.

**The chilling effect of *Staatsräson***

The German state has not succeeded in completely preventing expressions of solidarity with and support for Palestine. In fact, even when the total ban on protests was still in place in October 2023, many people came together for spontaneous actions on the streets of Berlin. While cultural institutions and universities were keeping their spaces closed for debate and dissent, those who protested on the streets were subjected to massive police violence.[23]

However, the continuation of protest despite bans came at a high price. The Campaign for Victims of Racist Police Violence recorded over a hundred cases of people, including minors, being detained on 16 October 2023 for wearing a kufiya or carrying a Palestinian flag, or simply because they were read as 'Arab' by the police. The campaign also documented cases of police violence against protesters, including the use of pepper spray, kneeling on their necks, and carrying them away violently.[24] Palestinian community groups and some human rights organizations have since sharply criticized Berlin police for using excessive force against protesters during pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Berlin.[25] In those cases

that finally reach the courts, people were prevented from exercising their rights to freedom of speech, protest and political participation, and were made to spend money, time and energy on law cases in the hope that the courts would reinstate them. Burdened by police action against them, lawsuits by now seem the only way to fight back unfounded legal actions that aim to silence those reminding Germany of its commitment to fundamental and human rights.

In the meantime, *Staatsräson* continues to affect the legitimate exercise of human and fundamental rights. Because of the way the law is being applied, and in part adjudicated in courts, what is legal and what is illegal is often unclear to citizens and residents, not least because it varies from state to state – as the jurisprudence on the slogan 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' illustrates.[26] While some courts consider that the utterance of the slogan should only be punishable if it has a clearly recognizable reference to Hamas ideology, for other courts, the slogan is considered an emblem of a terrorist organization pursuant to Section 86a (1) no. 1 of the Criminal Code.[27]

This can lead people refraining from engaging in permissible actions simply because they are unsure whether they might be legally sanctioned or not. This phenomenon – a legal effect on activity outside the scope of its intended target – is typically called a 'chilling effect'. Together, these create an overall feeling of insecurity; it is unclear what can be said without being prosecuted, who can rent out public space without being charged, and who can be invited for public panels without losing funding.

The legal effects of *Staatsräson* are part of a bigger alarming trend: the accumulation of soft law terms and definitions that erode fundamental rights. The German government adopted an extended version of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of

antisemitism, which was explicitly promoted as ‘non-legally binding’.[28] The Bundestag’s 2019 resolution against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which clearly states that a rejection of antisemitism and a commitment to Israeli security are ‘part of German *Staatsräson*’, functions in a similar way.[29] What all of these terms and definitions have in common is that they are not laws that could therefore be declared unconstitutional – and yet they have immense legal effects.

## *Staatsräson* and the rule of law

What makes these soft law concepts and executive measures so dangerous is that they do not fit the normative understanding of a liberal state based on the rule of law. The German constitutional court has ruled that the principle of the rule of law aims to ‘bind and limit public authority in order to protect individual freedom’.[30] But because the terms of German *Staatsräson* are unclear in key respects, and widely open to interpretation, they can be and are instrumentalized by those in executive power. They have already caused confusion and generated controversy and have the potential to weaken the fight against antisemitism.[31]

Similarly, the adoption and promotion of the IHRA definition of antisemitism across the EU has facilitated human rights violations and incidents that are cause for alarm. Between 2021 and 2022 *Deutsche Welle* alone, the public service broadcaster, fired a total of seven Arab journalists whom it accused of antisemitism according to the IHRA definition, based on social media posts they had made. Not all journalists went against their firing. But in September 2022, a Bonn court ruled that it had dismissed some of them unlawfully.[32] There is reason to believe that the IHRA

definition of antisemitism is not fully compliant with, and supportive of, broader international human rights norms. [33]

As currently applied by German state authorities, the concept of *Staatsräson* endangers the exercise of fundamental rights. Its meaning remains purposefully unclear in key respects and widely open to different interpretations, which has caused confusion and generated controversy, hence weakening the fight against all kinds of discrimination and violence. In particular, the German police have invoked and leveraged the idea of *Staatsräson* to suppress human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, assembly and political participation and the right to equality and non-discrimination.

The Bundestag's research service has itself expressed concerns. In a report published last year, it stated:

> In the wake of the attack on Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023, the number of political commitments to the dictum of *Staatsräson* increased. In some cases, demands have also been made in this context to ban pro-Palestinian demonstrations or to criminalize the 'public denial of Israel's right to exist' under criminal law with reference to *Staatsräson*.[34]

It pointed out that 'in the liberal and natural law tradition, the idea of *Staatsräson* is opposed to the idea of law and the constitutional state'.[35]

For some time, German courts have largely rejected *Staatsräson* as a legal argument. In 2022, for instance, the Federal Administrative Court ruled that BDS was protected speech, and that public space cannot thus

cannot be withdrawn on this basis.[36] Nevertheless, the pushback of some courts against the repressive use of *Staatsräson* may not be sufficient to prevent a regression in the values upheld by the German state and society. By the end of 2024, two court decisions have raised questions regarding whether adjudication is indeed resisting the repressive use of *Staatsräson* to prevent such a regression.

One such ruling, by the fifth chamber of the Frankfurt/Main administrative court, explicitly referenced the first Bundestag resolution 'Never again is now', which addresses the foreign policy notion of *Staatsräson*, in order to reject an urgent application against arms exports to Israel – an application filed by a Palestinian from Gaza. The resolution calls on the federal government to 'continue to actively defend the existence and legitimate security interests of the State of Israel as a central principle of German foreign and security policy', and to support Israel's right to self-defence. According to the Frankfurt administrative court, the 'political duty of the federal government to actively protect Israel' could be 'substantially fulfilled through arms exports, provided such exports are justifiable under human rights and international law after due consideration by the federal government'.

This paragraph is particularly troubling, considering that Israel has been ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to comply with provisional measures due to the plausibility of genocide claims against Palestinians three times.[37] Furthermore, the ICJ has affirmed that Israel's illegal occupation violates two *jus cogens* principles (peremptory norms): the prohibition on acquiring territory by threat or use of force, and the right of peoples to self-determination – central pillars of international law.[38] The Never Again is Now motion in the resolution has thus been 'weaponized' in favour of the federal government's arms trade with Israel, illustrating how,

while formally non-binding and not subject to direct legal challenge, it can still produce indirect legal consequences.

In another case, concerning naturalization, the administrative court of Regensburg denied citizenship to a stateless Palestinian, referencing section 10, paragraph 1, sentence 1, No. 1a of the German Citizenship Act, as reformed on 27 June 2024, in light of the events of 7 October 2023.[39] According to this reform, a foreigner who has legally resided in Germany for five years and fulfils other criteria may be naturalized upon application if this person 'acknowledges Germany's special historical responsibility for the National Socialist reign of injustice and its consequences, particularly for the protection of Jewish life, the peaceful coexistence of peoples, and the prohibition of waging a war of aggression'. The administrative court of Regensburg extended this provision to require a 'substantively effective commitment by the naturalization applicant to the recognition of the State of Israel's right to exist'.

In its ruling, the court went beyond the actual wording of the reformed citizenship law, effectively referencing *Staatsräson* in denying citizenship to the stateless Palestinian. Moreover, the court explicitly justified the rejection on the grounds that the 'applicant revealed an anti-Zionist attitude that was not motivated by antisemitism'. Both the question of who is or is not antisemitic, as well as who is or is not anti-Zionist, has now entered the legal vocabulary. This ruling is legally significant as there is no recognized legal concept of a 'right to exist'. States come into being through recognition, which is granted by other states rather than by individuals.

The concept of *Staatsräson* has made a dramatic shift – from a non-binding foreign policy notion to one that exerts legally repressive effects. The shift is likely to permanently alter the German legal landscape, steering

it away from the liberal *Rechtsstaat* that the Federal Republic of Germany has strived to build over the past several decades.

# Notes

## Introduction

[1] The exports include corvettes, rocket launchers, ammunition, and tank engines. See Forensis, *Short Study: German Arms Exports to Israel 2003–2023* (Berlin: Forensis, 2024), forensic-architecture.org. See also Roula Khalaf, ‘German Arms Exports to Israel Surge as Berlin Backs Campaign Against Hamas’, *Financial Times*, 9 November 2023; ‘Rüstungsexporte nach Israel fast verzehnfacht’, *Tagesschau*, 8 November 2023, tagesschau.de.

[2] This in turn led Nicaragua to bring a case against Germany in the ICJ. See ‘The Republic of Nicaragua Institutes Proceedings Against the Federal Republic of Germany and Requests the Court to Indicate Provisional Measures’, International Court of Justice, 1 March 2024, icj-cij.org.

[3] United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, ‘2023 Confirmed Pledges to UNRWA’s Programmes as of 31 December 2023’, unrwa.org.

[4] See Wade Jacoby and Jonathan Hopkin, ‘From Lever to Club? Conditionality in the European Union During the Financial Crisis’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 8 (2019): 1157–77.

[5] See Hans Kundnani, ‘Discipline and Punish’, *Berlin Policy Journal*, 27 April 2018, berlinpolicyjournal.com.

[6] Adam Tooze, ‘Chartbook 271 Reasons of State: Memory Politics, U-Boats, Iran and the German-Israeli Relationship’, *Chartbook*, 26

March 2024, adamtooze.substack.com.

[7] Susan Neiman, ‘Historical Reckoning Gone Haywire’, *New York Review of Books*, 19 October 2023, nybooks.com.

[8] On the concept of philosemitism, also see chapter 6 by Daniel Cohen in this volume. On Masha Gessen and Candice Breitz, see chapter 8 by Hanno Hauenstein in this volume.

[9] On the system of antisemitism commissioners, also see Peter Kuras, ‘The Strange Logic of Germany’s Antisemitism Bureaucrats’, *Jewish Currents*, 18 July 2023, jewishcurrents.org.

[10] Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *‘Opa war kein Nazi’. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002).

[11] See for example Christian Staas, ‘Was geht mich das noch an’, *Die Zeit*, 4 November 2010, zeit.de.

[12] I would like to thank Daniel Levy for the idea of a ‘post-Zionist’ Germany.

[13] See Muriel Asseburg, ‘Fifty Years of German–Israeli Diplomatic Relations’, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Comment 2015/C 27, 5 May 2015, 2, swp-berlin.org. Asseburg writes: ‘Although these arms exports contradict the principle of not exporting to regions of tension, they have been justified under the “if it floats it’s OK” rule attributed to former Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.’

[14] See for example Felix Klein, ‘Hierarchien des Hasses’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 February 2024, faz.net.

[15] Carola Luntz, ‘Kulturarbeit muss unabhängig bleiben!’, *Spiegel*, 14 January 2024, spiegel.de.

[16] Deutscher Bundestag, Wissenschaftliche Dienste, *Entstehung, Wandel und Entwicklung des Staatsräson-Begriffs in Deutschland*

(Deutscher Bundestag, 2023), 6, bundestag.de.

## 1 A Miracle of Reconciliation? Behind the Façade of German–Israeli Relations

[1] Konrad Adenauer, interview by Günter Gaus, *Zur Person*, 4 January 1966, rbb-online.de.

[2] Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

[3] Constantin Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden. Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung für NS-Verfolgte seit 1945*, 2nd edn (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 173.

[4] T. Ebeling, 'Bericht über die Durchführung des Abkommens zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und dem Staate Israel vom 10. September 1952', in Auftrag des Vorsitzenden der Deutschen Delegation in der Deutsch-Israelischen Gemischten Kommission, 1966, 25.

[5] Ian Lustick, 'Negotiating Truth: The Holocaust, Lehavdil and al-Nakba', *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (2006): 55.

[6] Paul Rivlin, *The Israeli Economy from the Foundation of the State Through the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37.

[7] Jonathan Nitzan and Shimson Bichler, *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 122.

[8] Lily Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship Between West Germany and Israel* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 97.

[9] Günter Könke, 'Wiedergutmachung und Modernisierung. Der Beitrag des Luxemburger Abkommens von 1952 zur wirtschaftlichen

Entwicklung Israels', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 75, no. 4 (1988): 533. See also Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship Between West Germany and Israel*, 90.

[10] Roni Stauber, 'The Impact of the Sinai Campaign on Relations Between Israel and West Germany', *Modern Judaism* 33, no. 3 (2013): 235.

[11] Ibid., 250.

[12] Ibid., 252.

[13] Shimon Peres, *David's Sling* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 72.

[14] Rolf Vogel, *The German Path to Israel: A Documentation* (London: Wolff, 1969), 124.

[15] Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship Between West Germany and Israel*, 126.

[16] Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 316. Of the 50,000 Uzis Germany ordered, only 40,000 were needed by the Bundeswehr. The German defence ministry sold 10,000 Uzis to Portugal, which was at the time engaged in a colonial war in Angola.

[17] Jekutiel Deligdisch, *Die Einstellung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zum Staate Israel: Eine Zusammenfassung der Entwicklung seit 1949* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1974), 66.

[18] Vogel, *The German Path to Israel*, 132.

[19] Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office), B1, Bd 81, 13 September 1961.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Germany and Israel established diplomatic relations in 1965, which means that bilateral relations were at their most important when there

was no official form to them. For the FRG, the optimal timing for diplomatic relations would have been upon the conclusion of the 1952 Reparations Agreement, as signalled by Adenauer in the Bundestag at the time and by what German diplomats have told the Israelis since. In 1952, diplomatic relations with Germany were impossible for Israel for purely domestic reasons. By 1956, however, diplomatic relations had become defendable to the public, not least due to Germany's reliability in fulfilling the Reparations Agreement (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, B130, Bd 8448, 15 August 1963). It is again indicative of the weakness of the moral explanation of Germany's Israel policy that the FRG was virtually the only major western nation not diplomatically represented in Tel Aviv until 1965, *despite* the Israelis requesting it.

[22] *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1967* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998), document 214.

[23] Michael Sontheimer, 'Ausstellung über Verleger Axel Springer. Fluchtpunkt Jerusalem', *die tageszeitung*, 12 March 2012.

[24] 'Tötet, tötet', *Spiegel*, 11 June 1967.

[25] Kenneth Lewan, *Der Nahostkrieg in der westdeutschen Presse* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1970), 87.

## 2 Not Hiroshima or Oslo but Gaza: German U-boats and the Israeli Nuclear Deterrent

[1] Luke Harding and Harriet Sherwood, 'Günter Grass's Israel Poem Provokes Outrage', *Guardian*, 5 April 2012, theguardian.com.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Hans Rühle, ‘Hat Deutschland Israels Atomwaffen finanziert?’, *Die Welt*, 14 April 2015, welt.de.

[4] Mark Fitzpatrick, ‘Israel’s Ballistic-Missile Programme: An Overview’, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 25 August 2021, iiss.org.

[5] See ‘German Submarine Exports’, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, warpp.info.

[6] R. Jeffrey Smith and Marc Fisher, ‘German Firms Primed Iraq’s War Machine’, *Washington Post*, 22 July 1992, washingtonpost.com.

[7] Yossi Melman, ‘Swimming with the Dolphins’, *Haaretz*, 9 June 1998, nuke.fas.org.

[8] Harold Hough, ‘Israel Reviews Its Nuclear Deterrent’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 10, no. 11 (November 1998): 11.

[9] David Hirst, ‘The War Game’, *Guardian*, 20 September 2003, theguardian.com.

[10] ‘Israel’s Deployment of Nuclear Missiles on Subs from Germany’, *Spiegel*, 4 June 2012, spiegel.de.

[11] Louis René Beres, ‘Navigating Chaos: Israel, Nuclear Ambiguity and the “Samson Option”’, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 10 March 2024, besacenter.org.

## 3 From Universalism to Particularism: Israeli Security as German *Staatsräson*

[1] A previous version of this chapter was published as ‘The Failure of Germany’s Memory Culture’, *Dissent* 71, no. 2 (Spring 2024): 66–73.

[2] Susan Neiman, ‘Historical Reckoning Gone Haywire’, *New York Review of Books*, 19 October 2023.

[3] Interview with the author, 9 December 2007.

[4] Michael Jürgs, *Der Fall Springer* (Munich: List, 1995), 274.

[5] There remains some uncertainty about the exact criteria that were used to separate the two groups of passengers in Entebbe. Some of the hostages claimed that the hijackers sought to distinguish Jewish passengers, including those who were not Israeli citizens, from non-Jewish passengers. Others claimed that the separation was done on the basis of citizenship rather than race or religion. It is now clear that at least some of the passengers who were released were Jewish. It is also clear that some passengers who were Jewish but not Israeli citizens remained among those who were held hostage. What remains unclear is whether these passengers had chosen to do so, for example because they were travelling with other family members who were Israeli citizens, or were forced to do so. See Alexander Sedlmaier and Freia Anders, '"Unternehmen Entebbe" 1976: Quellenkritische Perspektiven auf eine Flugzeugentführung', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 22 (2013): 267–89.

[6] Jeffrey Gettleman and Isabel Kershner, 'Benjamin Netanyahu Traces Path to Power Back to Entebbe, and Lost Brother', *New York Times*, 4 July 2016.

[7] On Adenauer's attitude to Israel, see chapter 1 by Daniel Marwecki in this volume.

[8] Deutscher Bundestag, 121. Sitzung, Bonn, Mittwoch, den 13. Oktober 1982, 7220, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/09/09121.pdf.

[9] Joschka Fischer, 'Wir Kinder der Kapitulanten', *Die Zeit*, 10 May 1985.

[10] Interview with the author, 16 November 2006.

[11] Heinrich August Winkler, ‘Rede zum 70. Jahrestag des 8. Mai 1945 im Deutschen Bundestag’, in *Zerreißproben. Deutschland, Europa und der Westen. Interventionen 1990–2015* (Munich: Beck, 2015), 207.
[12] Patrick Bahners, ‘Was würde man denn selber tun? Die Kritik an Israel verrät, was die Deutschen aus der Geschichte gelernt haben’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 April 2002.
[13] ‘Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor der Knesset am 18. März 2008 in Jerusalem’, Federal Government, bundesregierung.de.
[14] Rudolf Dreßler, ‘Gesicherte Existenz Israels – Teil der deutschen Staatsräson’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 4 April 2005, 8.
[15] Christoph Schult and Klaus Wiegrefe, ‘The True Story Behind Merkel’s Promise to Israel’, Spiegel, 24 January 2024.
[16] Jürgen Zimmerer, *Erinnerungskämpfe. Neues deutsches Geschichtsbewusstsein* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2023), 21.
[17] SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and FDP, *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit*, coalition agreement 2021–25 (Düren: Schloemer & Partner, 2021), 123.
[18] ‘Pressestatement von Bundeskanzler Scholz anlässlich seines Besuchs im Staat Israel am 17. Oktober 2023 in Tel Aviv’, Federal Government, transcript of press conference, 17 October 2023, bundesregierung.de.
[19] Hanno Hauenstein, ‘Triumph of the *Bild*: Nemi El-Hassan’s Firing Was Just Plain Wrong’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 4 October 2021. Also see chapter 8 by Hauenstein in this volume.
[20] Kate Brady, ‘In This East German State, Recognising Israel Is a Citizenship Requirement’, *Washington Post*, 6 December 2023.

[21] Cathrin Gilbert and Holger Stark, ‘Mathias Döpfner: “Aber das ist dennoch die einzige Chance, um den endgültigen Niedergang des Landes zu vermeiden”’, *Die Zeit*, 16/2023.

## 4 The German Catechism and Israel

[1] See ‘Forum: The Achille Mbembe Controversy and the German Debate about Antisemitism, Israel, and the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 2 (2021).

[2] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[3] Jürgen Zimmerer and Michael Rothberg, ‘Enttabuisiert den Vergleich!’, *Die Zeit*, 4 April 2021; Thomas Schmidt, ‘Der Holocaust war kein Kolonialverbrechen’, *Die Zeit*, 11 April 2021.

[4] ‘GG 5.3’ was a reference to the article on intellectual and artistic freedom in the *Grundgesetz*, or Basic Law, which is often abbreviated to ‘GG’. See ‘Statement by the “Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit”’, 20 December 2020, humboldtforum.org. Also see chapter 8 by Hanno Hauenstein in this volume.

[5] A. Dirk Moses, ‘The German Catechism’, *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, 23 May 2021, geschichtedergegenwart.ch.

[6] Ralf Fücks (@fuecks), ‘Wenn die planmäßige Ausrottung der Judenheit nur rein Unterkapitel des europäischen Rassismus und der kolonialen Gewaltgeschichte war’, 28 July 2021, twitter.com.

[7] Ralf Fücks (@fuecks), ‘Einspruch: Merkels Satz von Israels Sicherheit als deutsche Staatsräson folgt unserer historischen

Verantwortung gegenüber dem jüdischen Staat', 3 March 2023, twitter.com.

[8] Michael Wolffsohn, 'Jetzt kommen Holocaust-Relativierer auch von links', *Die Welt*, 17 August 2021.

[9] Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, 'Um die '"Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus": Ein Briefwechsel', *Vierteljahrsheft für Zeitgeschichte* 36 (1988): 339–72.

[10] Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[11] Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi* Past; Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz*: *Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust* (London: Hurst, 2009); *Ulrike Jureit* und Christian Schneider, *Gefühlte Opfer*: *Illusionen der Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010); Y. Michal Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater. Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche Erfindung* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2001).

[12] See Jürgen Habermas, *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995).

[13] 'Gauland bezeichnet NS-Zeit als "Vogelschiss in der Geschichte"', *Die Welt*, 2 June 2018.

[14] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[15] Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (Hamburg: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1987).

[16] See A. Dirk Moses, 'The Weimar Syndrome in the Federal Republic of Germany: Carl Schmitt and the Forty-Fiver Generation of Intellectuals', in Holger Zaborowski and Stephan Loos eds, *Leben, Tod*

*und Entscheidung: Studien zur Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 2003), 187–207.

[17] Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann, eds, *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

[18] See Statistisches Bundesamt, 'Migration and Integration', destatis.de.

[19] See chapter 7 by Esra Ozyürek in this volume.

[20] 'Muslims in Germany: Religion Not a Good Gauge of Integration', Deutsche Welle, 28 April 2021, dw.com; Anya Topolski, 'Europe's Minority Management Machine', *RePLITO*, 4 February 2022, replito.de.

[21] Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Die Konkurrenz der Opfer: Genozid, Identität und Anerkennung* (Lüneburg: Klampen Verlag, 2001); Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

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[23] Stephen Detjen, 'Antisemitismusbeauftragte als diskursiver Schrankenwärter', Deutschlandradio, 23 May 2020, d-a-g.de.

[24] 'Historische Verantwortung wahrnehmen – Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen', 20. Wahlperiode, 8 November 2023, dip.bundestag.de.

[25] Caspar Schwietering, 'Streit um Antisemitismusbekämpfung: Zentralrat der Juden will zwischen Ampel und Union vermitteln', *Tagesspiegel*, 11 April 2024.

[26] 'Nie wieder ist jetzt: Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken', Antrag – Entwurf der Fraktionen der SPD,

CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP. No date.

[27] ‘Keiner wird als Antisemit geboren’, interview with Josef Schuster, Tagesschau, 9 November 2023, tagesschau.de.

[28] Konrad Litschko, ‘“Erkenne dieses Land nicht wieder”’, *taz*, 6 December 2023.

[29] ‘Nie wieder ist jetzt.’

[30] Bundesverband der Recherche- und Informationsstellen Antisemitismus (RIAS), ‘Höchststand antisemitischer Vorfälle in Deutschland’, 25 June 2024, report-antisemitism.de; ‘Antisemitismus äußert sich immer gewaltvoller’, *taz*, 26 May 2024; 52 per cent of incidents were categorized as ‘Israel-related antisemitism’.

[31] ‘German Police Shut Down Pro-Palestinian Conference’, Deutsche Welle, 13 April 2024; Loveday Morris, ‘Germany Bars Doctor Who Worked in Gaza, Shuts Down Palestinian Conference’, *Washington Post*, 3 April 2024; Daniel Bax, ‘Einreiseverbot für Varoufakis’, *taz*, 15 April 2024.

[32] See chapter 8 by Hanno Hauenstein in this volume.

## 5 Two Kinds of *Staatsräson*: The Holocaust and German Colonialism

[1] Namibian Presidency (@NamPresidency), ‘Namibia rejects Germany’s Support of the Genocidal Intent of the Racist Israeli State against Innocent Civilians in Gaza’, 13 January 2024, x.com.

[2] Von Trotha had also been involved in the suppression of resistance in German East Africa (present-day Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania) and the ‘Boxer Rebellion’ in China.

[3] ‘Antwort der Bundesregierung auf eine Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Niema Movassat, Wolfgang Gercke, Sevim Dagdelen, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE’, 14 August 2012, Drucksache 17/10481, dip.bundestag.de.

[4] Reinhart Kößler and Henning Melber, *Völkermord – und was dann? Die Politik der deutsch-namibischen Vergangenheitsbearbeitung* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2017), 59.

[5] Media Conference Statement by Ida Hoffmann, Chairperson of the Nama Genocide Technical Committee, https://web.archive.org/web/20230612114450/http://genocide-namibia.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/PRESS-RELEASE-NOV-2016.pdf.

[6] ‘Joint Declaration by the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Namibia, “United in Remembrance of Our Colonial Past, United in Our Will to Reconcile, United in Our Vision of the Future”’, parliament.na.

[7] For a summary of the difficult negotiations and debates about the Herero and Nama genocide and its importance for German identity, see Jürgen Zimmerer, ‘Der Völkermord an den Herero und Nama und die deutsche Geschichte’, in Jürgen Zimmerer, ed., *Erinnerungskämpfe. Neues deutsches Geschichtsbewusstsein* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2023), 55–79. An English edition of the book will be published in 2025.

[8] ‘Rede von Bundestagspräsident Wolfgang Thierse zur Eröffnung des “Denkmals für die ermordeten Juden Europas”’, 10 May 2005, bundestag.de.

[9] Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster: LIT, 2011). The book has recently been published in English as *From Windhoek to*

*Auschwitz? Reflections on the Relationship Between Colonialism and National Socialism?* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

[10] Jürgen Habermas, 'Der neue Historikerstreit', *Philosophie Magazin* 60, no. 6 (2021): 10–11. On the question of comparison, see also Jürgen Zimmerer and Michael Rothberg, 'Enttabuisiert den Vergleich!', *Die Zeit*, 4 April 2021, zeit.de.

[11] Habermas, 'Der neue Historikerstreit', 10–11.

[12] In the coalition agreement signed in 2021, the Social Democrats, Greens, and Free Democrats committed to deepen understanding of Germany's colonial history, in particular by developing a concept for 'a place of learning and remembrance of colonialism' – in other words, a memorial. SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and FDP, *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit*, coalition agreement 2021–25 (Düren: Schloemer & Partner, 2021), 100, spd.de.

[13] On the documenta 15 controversy, see chapter 8 by Hanno Hauenstein in this volume. On the Berlinale controversy, see Philp Oltermann, 'German Minister Says She Clapped Israeli Film-Maker, Not His Palestinian Colleague, at Berlinale', *Guardian*, 27 February 2024, theguardian.com. On the different treatment of antisemitism at the documenta 15 and the Humboldt Forum see: Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Humboldt-Forum und Documenta', *Berliner Zeitung*, 3 August 2022, berliner-zeitung.de.

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# 6 The Radicalization of German Philosemitism

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